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# Digging Into Playwriting

Gleason Holt

*East Tennessee State University*

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# Digging Into Playwriting

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Communication and Performance  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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by  
Gleason Holt  
May 2018

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Mr. Herb Parker, Chair  
Mr. Robert Funk  
Dr. Katherine Weiss

Keywords: Play, playwright, script, draft, workshop

## ABSTRACT

### Digging Into Playwriting

by

Gleason Holt

The intent of this thesis was to write an original play and detail the writing process. Themes dealt with in *Jane (or, Dug In)* are family, coping with grief, survivor's guilt, and exploration (both literal and personal). In addition to the full script, this thesis explores the inspirations for the play and its title. The play's genre is analyzed, and reasoning is given for this selection. Included are omitted scenes from the latest draft to offer additional insight into the playwright's previous versions. A reading of the third draft was presented and detailed in this thesis. A section about future scenes and potential projects involving this script are examined.

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## DEDICATION

(In memory of Patrick Gunter.)

To my ten nieces and nephews: Elijah, Trey, Kaleb, Mikaela, Aydan, Emily, Isabella, Isabel, Haylee, and Leah. Being your uncle is among the greatest joys in my life. You are each capable of greater things than you know. Uncle Taylor loves you.

To my sister, Kate, and her husband, Chase, for opening their door at any hour when I need a couch to crash on, even when that becomes an entire summer. To my mother, Tammy, for constantly reminding me of how proud she is of me. To my grandparents, Festes and Carol Holt; I love you a bushel and a peck. To my adopted big brothers, Andy and Cody, thanks for letting Brenda be my grandmother as well.

To the five women who are why I am in theatre: Linda Caruthers, for instilling a love of theatre in me at 15 years old; Victoria Elliot, for being my first leading lady; Gabby Wexler, for reminding me of my love for theatre after four and a half years away; Opal Clark, for being a teacher and colleague; Kimberly Ireson, for being the best partner I have had on and off stage.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to first acknowledge my thesis committee. Herb Parker agreed to write a letter of recommendation for my graduate school admissions and then became the chair of my thesis. It feels appropriate that my first theatre professor would be encouraging me until the very end of my unpredictable career at ETSU. Bobby Funk was the second person added. While I have rarely ever scheduled a meeting with him, Bobby and I spent hours at a time discussing plays, movies, sports, and politics when I would just drop in. Dr. Katherine Weiss was the last addition to my committee, and I cannot thank her enough for lending her wealth of knowledge on literature. A play that is essentially about writers was immensely aided by her expertise.

Some debt is owed to anyone I ever shared billing or class credit with, but above all others, I truly thank the ETSU Patchwork Players for enabling me to grow and challenge myself as an artist for the past three years. I would not have the confidence to write script after script without their support. The German translation was provided by Dr. Raluca M. Negrisanu and Denise Harness, and I cannot thank them enough for providing greater authenticity to this project. Additionally, I want to thank Pat Cronin and Dr. John M. Rankin for their letters of recommendation, encouragement, and advice over the years.

Lastly, I want to thank the Department of Communication and Performance for the opportunities provided to me over these past two years. I did not expect to take as much away from monitoring a computer lab as I have, but I am better for the experiences. Caroline, Kynlee, and Mark: thanks for being the student-workers to last the two years with me. Angela, Tess, and John: our cohort became a family that helped us each get over the finish line. We did it.

## CHAPTER 1

### INSPIRATION AND PERSPIRATION

*"I hate writing, but I love to have written." – Dr. Amber Kinser*

#### *Inspiration*

The decision to write *Jane (or, Dug In)* was long coming. To understand the sway this story holds on me I need to explain its origin and the early concepts that came to me. First, I spent my childhood playing in the woods and exploring caves. Near my childhood home was a patch of woods I roamed. In these woods, a massive sinkhole opened in the ground. My friends and I dreamed of entering this sinkhole to find where it led. When I was no older than 16 years old, I was watching *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (Chaffin, Kennedy, Marshall, & Fincher, 2008). While this film was released in December of 2008, it was most likely a subsequent viewing with my parents that sparked my first glimpse of *Jane*. The final scene shows the flooding from Hurricane Katrina claim a warehouse. Inside, Mr. Gateau's clock that ticks backwards, a reference to the titular character's reverse aging, is slowly submerged in the water. It was this moment that my story began to take shape, and I cite my predisposition to exploring natural wonders as a subconscious influence.

My mind created an image of water washing into a cave. This cave was flooded in a similar manner as the warehouse, but the victims of this flood were not homes or buildings; the flood in my mind eventually washed away works of art and statues. Why were these priceless treasures being consumed by the flood? Because a grief-stricken man decreed in his will that they be placed at the mouth of the cave in anticipation of reoccurring flood. Why? His childhood friends were drowned in the cave, and the treasurers were meant to be a way of uniting their memory with their unfulfilled dreams.



Original incarnations involved the character who became Malcolm having a specially designed bank vault believed to contain his treasure. The stakes were raised because said vault is set to destroy itself with the walls closing in shortly after Malcolm's death, and the treasure is supposed to be the grandest in history: the Mona Lisa, the statue of David, and various priceless works that were eventually fictionalized treasures. Naturally people would want to save these artworks, but access to the vault was a mystery. In Malcolm's dying words, he said his treasure is with Janey, thus the pursuit to discover who this woman is. An investigation team springs up to uncover this mystery for the sake of Malcolm's vast fortune set to self-destruct. Janey is revealed to be an anagram for the last names of Malcolm's childhood friends who died in the cave. Malcolm's vault is revealed to have personal effects, things he wished to take into the afterlife with him, so to speak. A voiceover by Malcolm says how his heart is with Janey as the walls crush his earthly possessions. Crates placed just inside the mouth of the cave are the treasures Malcolm's deceased friends longed for, soon claimed by a flood similar to the one that took his friends' lives.

I cannot attest to where this narrative took every turn in nine years of planning. There were several attempts to realize this story, be it film script or novel. Neither of these came to fruition. Before this thesis, I wrote two one-acts, but neither were *Janey*. ETSU Patchwork Players produced my first one-act, *Emergency Contact*, in April 2016 in the Campus Center Building's black box studio. It was not until the summer before I began grad school that I started writing scenes of what has become *Jane (or, Dug In)*. After writing my first one-act, I could not decide what to write next as I wrote scenes for four different plays, with *Jane* being one of them. Rather than pursue one of these four concepts, I abandoned them for a fifth idea that became *Killer, Babe!*, my second one-act. Reflecting on this sporadic creative process is juxtaposed to

my ongoing affair with the story of *Jane*. *Jane*'s story has been with me for over a third of my life, crafting itself in the back of my mind, but it never received the attention it required since several simpler concepts held my focus just enough to distract me.

### *Perspiration*

As I discussed my script options with Herb Parker I had a total of five ideas I pitched to him. Their working titles were: *Chaos*, *Elephants in the Closet*, *I Beg Your Pardon*, *Janey*, and *Killer, Babe!* Rather than selecting for me, Herb had me write a first, middle, and final scene for each play. This process was beneficial as it forced me to explore what excited me about each script, as well as discover potential challenges I might face as a playwright. Of these five, each had been on my mind for at least a year. *Chaos* was inspired by a love of science fiction and video games, with the title being inspired by the chaotic nature of the plot and Chaos, the Greek god of space. *Elephants in the Closet* served as a political protest to the 2016 United States presidential election; this eventually became the basis of a ten-minute play I wrote, submitted, and was selected for a staged reading in Patchwork's annual ten-minute play festival. *I Beg Your Pardon* was a way I would examine the systemic racism in America but would be a period piece, relying on my undergraduate training in historical analysis and political science. *Killer, Babe!* was the second one-act I wrote, so I intended to expand it into two full acts. The title serves as the band's name, a play on the phrasing of "that's killer, babe," or "sounds killer, babe." The play is set up as an interview of Killer, Babe! after the band has broken up. It incorporates flashbacks of the band's formation and nasty breakup. This play was inspired by personal friendships that ended in bitterness with the metaphor of a band as the backdrop. I was inspired by the dissolution of The Beatles and Savage Garden, two instances where I am as intrigued by the band as I am by their music.

As we discussed the things that drew me to each script, it seemed to Herb that *Janey* was the one calling to me above the other four. I knew he was right. From the moment I first conceptualized this story until the moment I picked it as my thesis, the hold on this story has survived every drastic change in my life. I lost the passion required of a theatre major my first semester in college. As a result, my bachelor's degree was in history. But even as I contemplated a master's in history or law school, *Janey* remained that "what if" that plagued my creative side. "What if I found a way to finally write the script?" "What if I settled for a novel?" "What if I just write a little at a time? Would that add up?" While I do not regard *Jane* as the initial motivation to take theatre classes as a super senior or enroll in this master's program, the inexplicable sway the story held over me might be why I kept one foot in the door for a potential return to the theatre department. I realized that putting off *Janey* because I did not feel ready was easily remedied by the necessity of a thesis. After considering these variables, I found my thesis script.

When I began writing, there was no indication to me that the first draft would be as long as it was. My fear was that I would be left with a bloated one-act, like *Emergency Contact* which had a runtime of almost one hour. At an hour, your audience is conditioned for an intermission. This was hardly the case because nine years spent with this story left me with too much material. The first draft was 92 pages when properly formatted (104 in its original format). Bobby Funk shared his philosophy for gauging a play's runtime: two minutes for every page of action. This has held true for *Emergency Contact*. Expecting modern audiences to sit through three and a half hours of theatre does not sound reasonable. I cannot say that I would care to sit through such a long play, even one I wrote. This draft was also set heavy. Bobby made me consider the costs of being set heavy for small theatres that might want to produce this script. By narrowing the

location to only Malcolm's office and allowing for the expeditions and side scenes to be fluid, it enables any theatre with any budget to produce this script.

### *A Play By Any Other Name*

As mentioned, the title of my script started out as *Janey*. This served as an anagram for the dead children's surnames, including Malcolm's. Janey is similar to "Jane Doe" in cases of anonymity. When the mystery behind Janey's identity was revealed to be a widow I still kept this title. *Janey* was the title through the majority of my thesis process. Even as my committee made suggestions to the contrary, I was set on this predetermined title; so it eventually made sense to shorten it solely to *Jane*. I had three children die in the cave flooding, not four as conceptualized. I could still use the anagram concept by incorporating the surnames (three children who drown and Malcolm). Janey is also a derivative of Jane, and my fear was that I would have to go into greater explanation with a nickname than a given name. It was not until I was preparing for my thesis defense that I truly took Dr. Katherine Weiss's advice about renaming the play. Her original suggestion was something related to caves, a recurring motif; ultimately, the metaphor of digging was pronounced enough throughout that I could not ignore it. Malcolm was digging into history on expeditions, and Zach was digging into the same places through his father's diaries. The digging concept intrigued her, and she said it was an important aspect of the script.

The title *Dug In* came to me. It alludes to the metaphor of Malcolm and Zach digging, but plays on the expression of someone being "dug in," as in stubborn. *Dug In* appeals to me when I consider how several characters, primarily Malcolm and Zach with their contentious relationship, display an unwillingness or inability to articulate their objective. I am still hesitant about a full name change because I am still hanging onto a notion I have had for years. In many respects, it is the name of Jane or Janey that has kept me so intrigued all these years. For years it was someone

asking “who is Janey?” that made me want to find an answer. Janey’s identity changed but my obsession with the anonymity endured. When speaking with female readers of my script, several expressed more intrigue in reading a play titled after a female name. I have arrived at an expanded working title of *Jane (or, Dug In)*. The prospect of publishing and/or workshopping this script at reputable theatres would be a great motivator for a definitive title, at which time I would decide.

### *Genre*

*Jane*’s genre is most aptly defined as selective realism. Selective realism combines realism and non-realism. Realism depicts ordinary life with realistic sets. Non-realism is a breach from the norm; people speak to themselves or in poetry or sing, they have superpowers, or anything unrealistic. Non-realism reminds audiences that they are watching a play, thus keeping them alert (Mackey & Cooper, 2000, p. 315). A play that uses selective realism that inspired me is *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee (2000). *Thoreau* has conventional dialogue (not poetry or sung) and the characters are historical figures (Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Abraham Lincoln). *Jane* uses historical locations, like the Valley of the Kings in Egypt, and all of the dialogue is conventional. As for non-realism, *Jane* has a nonlinear plot, an element directly inspired by *Thoreau*, with the latter script described as a place where “time and space are awash,” addressing the events leading up to and responsible for Henry’s arrest and subsequent incarceration (Lawrence & Lee, p. 3). *Thoreau*’s center stage calls for “the skeletal suggestion of a prison cell,” allowing all other flashbacks to play out on a minimalist set (p. 3). I wrote in the setting notes of *Jane* that “the set might be an authentic office or very minimalist with a desk or table and chair. The flashbacks require very minimal set pieces and props but can be made as elaborate as a director sees fit.”

Another non-realistic device in both scripts are base characters. By this, I refer to an actor playing a primary role that appears in later moment but as a variation of their primary role. In *Thoreau*, when Henry, a staunch pacifist, is enduring a nightmare, he sees that people from his life are being made into soldiers in the Mexican-American War. Deacon Ball, an antagonistic character toward Henry, is a general. Sam, the friendly town sheriff who arrested Henry, is a sergeant. Waldo, Henry's mentor and friend that Henry demands make public anti-slavery statements, is the President (a caricature of James K. Polk) orchestrating the war Henry opposes. Edward, Waldo's son and Henry's pupil, is a drummer boy that is killed in action. The Farmer joins the ranks as a soldier. Williams, a runaway slave that Henry aids, is a Mexican soldier that evades oppressive U.S. forces again. This violent exchange ends when the voice of Congressman Abraham Lincoln calls for an end to the war (Lawrence & Lee, p. 82-86). For my purposes, the three Explorers reappear in each of Malcolm's expeditions that Zach examines. In the first expedition, they are German explorers, in the second, they are a PhD candidate, an engineer, and a miner, and in the third they represent Malcolm's childhood best friends that drowned in Bluford's Cave.

*Jane* can be categorized as a memory play, a subgenre of selective realism. Tennessee Williams coined the phrase, writing that "being a 'memory play,' *The Glass Menagerie* can be presented with unusual freedom of convention" in his notes published with the script (1970, p. 7). In *Menagerie*, Tom Wingfield is the protagonist and narrator whose introduction to the audience is a literal introduction; he starts the play by establishing the proceedings as his own memories, and that he is an unreliable narrator. Tom admits he can be deceitful, saying "yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve," but suggests he is not a liar because he will "give you the truth in a pleasant disguise of illusion" (p. 22). This device also establishes the

genre: memory plays are when the protagonist narrates past events from their life to the audience. Traditionalists could argue that *Jane*'s use of memory does not qualify as a memory play since it is Malcolm's memories being narrated, but are narrated by Zach. The diaries are meant to be a reliable recreation, and any potential inaccuracies are not addressed in the script, another deviation from Williams's definition. My reason for defining it as a memory play is the reliance on memories, namely ones that are narrated, to further the plot.

Like Williams, I incorporate a physical reminder of memories. Tom explains that his father, Mr. Wingfield, "is a fifth character in the play who doesn't appear except in this larger-than-life photograph over the mantel" (p. 23). Williams has written into the stage directions interactions with Mr. Wingfield's photograph. In act one, scene three, Tom tells Amanda if he were truly selfish that he would quit his warehouse job and leave like his father, then points to the photograph (p. 41). Amanda addresses Mr. Wingfield's picture, whether it is his charm (p. 36), introducing him in abstention (p. 82), or subtly in stage directions. *Jane* is set in Malcolm's private office. This office contains Malcolm's personal library and is where Zach, Ellie, and Cal pour over their parents' personal writings. Malcolm's desk is the center of the investigation, the place where Zach begins his journey into reconciliation with who his father was. Zach inheriting his Malcolm's office and writings is a gesture that represents a father finally giving himself to his son by finally revealing all his secrets.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Jane (or, Dug In)*

*Jane (or, Dug In)* is formatted as close as possible to fit the requirements for publication with Samuel French. For this format, I went to the Samuel French website where they provide a template for scripts submitted to them (General Formatting Guidelines for Stage Play Manuscripts, 2008). This template requires certain indentations for character names, dialogue, and stage directions, as well as a properly formatted cover page and list of characters. I have used Times New Roman and 12-point font.



**Jane (Or, Dug In)**

A Play in Two Acts

By

Gleason Holt

### Cast of Characters

<u>MALCOLM:</u>	30s/40s, explorer, PhD, husband, father, and appears only in flashbacks
<u>ZACH:</u>	mid/late 20s, freelance journalist, Malcolm's youngest child, estranged from his father and brother
<u>ELLIE:</u>	early 30s, President of the Able Foundation, Malcolm's oldest child
<u>CAL:</u>	late 20s/early 30s, business man, Malcolm's middle
<u>ALICE:</u>	50s/60s, Malcolm's older sister and caretaker
<u>DAVID:</u>	50s/60s, Malcolm's research partner, suffers from dementia, appears in flashbacks as a man in his 30s free of dementia
<u>PETE:</u>	early 30s, Ellie's husband
<u>PAUL:</u>	Malcolm's attorney
<u>CANDICE:</u>	30s/40s, Malcolm's deceased wife, appears only in flashbacks
<u>NORA:</u>	late 20s, newly graduated medical doctor
<u>EXPLORER 1:</u>	20s/30s, German explorer, Jacobs (PhD), and child
<u>EXPLORER 2:</u>	20s/30s, German explorer, Elliot (engineer), and child
<u>EXPLORER 3:</u>	20s/30s, German explorer, Nesmith (miner), and child

Casting notes: Double casting is at the director's discretion, especially in the case of David. Paul is gender neutral, and be renamed Paula for female actor.

### Place

Malcolm Able's office

### Time

Present Day

Setting: Bookcases line the walls. A liquor cabinet is situated somewhere in the room. The room is well-furnished. Chairs and perhaps a sofa is in this office. Malcolm's desk is exceptional. Everything is set in the office unless otherwise stated. If a scene is set "in the house," it is at the director's discretion how it is staged. Additionally, the set might be an authentic office or very minimalist with a desk or table and chair. The flashbacks require very minimal set pieces and props but can be made as elaborate as a director sees fit.

At rise: Malcolm's office is DARK. It is storming outside, a hurricane could make landfall off the east coast by nightfall, amplifying the storm. MALCOLM's ashes were scattered earlier that same day, prior to the storm hitting. The funeral party will congregate in the office for the meeting of the probate lawyer. The office is empty until ALICE opens the door, DAVID follows her in. ALICE flips the light switch, and LIGHTS UP)

ACT I  
Scene 1

ALICE

It hasn't rained like this since I was child. I am grateful that we are not in the hurricane's path, but the storms I can live without. David, do you want me to take off your coat?

DAVID  
(Overwhelmed)

It's been too long.

ALICE

Since you were last here?

DAVID

Yes. But I haven't been in this office since...

ALICE

Before the diagnosis?

DAVID

No, I imagine it was Candice's funeral. His cancer was discovered, what? Five months prior to her passing?

ALICE

That sounds about right.

DAVID

I shouldn't have let so much time lapse between our visits when he was so sick and alone...

ALICE

David, my brother never expected you to give up expeditions just because he couldn't go. I imagine your stories gave him comfort, you know? Something to hold on for.

DAVID

You're kind, Alice.

ALICE

Between us, David, I never expected Malcolm to outlive Candice for as long as he did. I don't mean to sound insensitive--

DAVID

No, you don't. He was given little more than a year, and the shock of her passing. Was it ever discovered what caused it?

ALICE

A heart defect of some sort; the doctor's explained it to us but I can't remember the details.

DAVID

I should have asked Malcolm. It just never felt like the right time.

ALICE

It never feels like the right time to upset a dying man. And that's what he was. Perhaps that's why I'm so adjusted to this. I haven't left his side, not since Candice passed away. I was there when he was going in for surgery, his last real option. I think every day I said goodbye little by little, so much that by the time he died on the operating table I was relieved. Again, I don't mean to sound cruel—

DAVID

Of course not. I feel insensitive being grateful for our last conversation to have been over the phone. I don't think I could have endured seeing how sick you said he was...

(PETE and ELLIE enter.)

ELLIE

Sorry, Margaret just didn't want to sleep. I see we are still waiting on the attorney.

PETE

I don't think I've ever been in here.

ELLIE

This was where the Able Foundation first started. Dad ran it out of his office when we were kids or when he got sick.

DAVID

I was standing right here when our editor called, saying our book on the Valley of the Kings was published.

PETE

I was reading that on the flight here.

DAVID

You can tell what sections I wrote because they were interesting. Mal possessed a dryer, almost reporter method of writing by that time.

ALICE

Speaking of reporter, where is our favorite journalist? Has anyone heard from Zach?

ELLIE

Not if you mean about coming or even missing Dad's funeral. We last spoke when he was in New York; he refused to stop by the foundation even though I swore Dad was not there. We met for lunch, he got some pictures with Margaret. That's been, how long would you say, honey?

PETE

Three months ago?

ELLIE

Since Mom died I'm probably the only person in the family he talks to. But when I've been texting him about this, he's just read them.

(CAL enters after trying to reach ZACH.)

CAL

He just spoke to me. After two years he finally answered my calls.

DAVID

Did he say why he was absent?

CAL

Something about a layover flight becoming a second layover.

PETE

Should I drive out to pick him up?

CAL

No, he says he has a rental. I swear if he's lying about why he missed our own father's funeral—

ALICE

We will forgive him as if it were the truth. This is about your father's legacy. So let's...liven it up. We didn't have a proper wake, did we? Remember how much better we felt because we gave Candi a proper wake?

CAL

Aside from my idiot brother threatening to punch me?

ALICE

That's before we even had the alcohol poured. Malcolm's last bottle of Scotch here. It's only fitting, right?

(ALICE begins pouring Scotch for everyone.)

DAVID

Oh, that's smooth.

PETE

Have some, dear.

ELLIE

No, I shouldn't.

ALICE

You aren't pregnant anymore. Here.

PETE

Does anyone want ice?

CAL

A Scotch this smooth doesn't need ice.

DAVID

You sound so like Mal saying that. This very likely is the last bottle from our time in South Africa. Their history of apartheid is regrettable to say the very least, but their Scotch is still the best I've ever had.

ALICE

That wasn't all you boys brought home. Cigars were something you and Malcolm were fond of collecting.

DAVID

Any chance we had to get Cuban cigars.

CAL

How were you able to smuggle them in?

DAVID

Our time in Haiti; the United States had a failed embargo on Cuba that the Haitians cared very little about. But any time a customs agent stopped us, your father had the ability to smooth the issue over with words, or the loss of a cigar or two.

(ZACH has entered the room but the party has not taken note of his entrance.)

ALICE

So where is that blasted humidior?

ZACH

You're wasting your time on the bookshelf; it was always in the top left drawer of his desk.

(Now ZACH has their attention. ELLIE greets him first with a hug.)

ELLIE

Little brother!

ZACH

Hey, sis.

PETE

You should have called when you couldn't get a way here, I would have picked you up.

ZACH

It was a nice drive. I got to hear NPR praise my freelance work for the *New York Times*.

DAVID

Does this mean you'll get around to interviewing me again?

ZACH

You're always too busy for me. Where's the next exploration for Dr. Tell?

DAVID

You can come with me, cover the entire affair.

ALICE

Okay, me next. Come here, nephew!

(CAL approaches, hesitantly. He offers ZACH his hand, which is ignored.)

CAL

Hey, Zach.

ZACH

Calvin.

(His curtness is felt by everyone in the room. Each make excuses to exit as to give the siblings some time alone.)

ALICE

I fear we don't have enough glasses. We were sampling your father's Scotch.

ZACH

Good stuff, huh? I'm not thirsty, though. You all enjoy.

ALICE

No, I insist.

(ALICE exits.)

DAVID

Pete, you wanted ice, right? None for you, Cal?

CAL

No, I'm—

(DAVID exits before he can hear CAL's reply. PETE kisses ELLIE on the forehead, indicating he's going to leave.)

ELLIE

You too?

PETE

Someone has to check on Margaret.

(PETE exits, giving the Able children their first moments alone in years.)

ELLIE

So the *New York Times*?

ZACH

There's a chance I could join their investigative department. But that's nothing compared to being named President of the Able Foundation.

ELLIE

Oh, stop it. You said more than enough in your article. But thank you.

CAL

I've been doing well, myself.

ZACH

Good for you, Cal.



CAL

Yeah. So *New York Times*, that's something good for you. I guess you gave up on the blog?

ZACH

It was never a blog—

CAL

Whatever, you turned down my investment. Or write about my Chicago opening.

ZACH

I don't do fluff pieces.

CAL

Writing about the new CEO of a nonprofit must have been hard-hitting investigation work.

ZACH

It just meant Ellie actually did something. Rich kid gets richer off Daddy buying him a business isn't newsworthy.

ELLIE

Enough, both of you.

CAL

Lancelot here can wipe his own nose.

ZACH

What did you just call me, you arrogant—

ELLIE

I will smack you both in the head like when we were kids. Don't think I can't. I take krav maga three times a week. How will it look for two grown men getting their asses kicked by their sister half their size? (Beat) Sorry. We aren't kids...we're here for Dad.

CAL

Some of us, anyways. He's not the only late Able.

ZACH

Sorry that layovers don't exist for guys with private jet access. I don't even know why I bothered coming—

(ZACH might try to leave here, but PETE and DAVID return.)

DAVID

Let me pour you a drink, Cal, you look like you could use one.

ZACH  
Cal already has one, Dave.

DAVID  
I mean Zach, of course.

ELLIE  
Where's my baby?

PETE  
Still sleeping. I had the baby monitor on me this entire time, she's not stirred once.

DAVID  
Yes, it's the same Scotch you've been sampling since you were 16.

ZACH  
Why didn't you ever have a son to pester about being a teenager?

DAVID  
Mario Puzo wrote that life is so hard you need a second father, hence my role in your life.

ZACH  
You're what makes it tough.

DAVID  
I never said I intended to make it any easier on my godson.

CAL  
David.

DAVID  
My other godson, yes?

CAL  
Where's Alice?

DAVID  
Alice?

PETER  
She was stopped at the door. Malcolm's attorney just made it through the rain.

ZACH  
David, want me to take your raincoat?

DAVID  
Yes, thank you, son.

ZACH

Tell me about your recent your research.

(DAVID and ZACH begin a private conversation but remain on stage.  
CAL and PETE are conversing with ELLIE when ALICE returns.)

ALICE

Everyone, you remember Paul Webster? He was your mother and father's attorney.

CAL

Of course, you were here for my mother's will reading. (Putting his hand out.) Calvin.

PAUL

I remember you, Mr. Able. I wish our meetings were under better circumstances, but alas...

ELLIE

We appreciate all you've done for our parents.

PAUL

Still more to do, Mrs. Morris. And congratulations to you and Peter on the birth of Margaret. I imagine that gave your father great comfort in his final months.

PETE

I'd like to think so.

ELLIE

How did you know—?

PAUL

About your newborn? I've been representing your parents for some time. Your father's final amendment to his will was to include Margaret, actually. Yes, a long partnership. But not as long as this man.

DAVID

I hate that we meet like this again, Paul. How've you been?

PAUL

Fine, Dr. Tell Saddened by our loss, but in another way, relieved, for Malcolm's sake.

ALICE

That is a common emotion, I think.

PAUL

(Referring to Malcolm's desk.)

May I?

ALICE

Of course.

(PAUL takes his seat at the desk.)

PAUL

Thank you, Ms. Able. I know what you all are thinking right now, and some of you I even know what you're feeling. My father passed some time ago, but the feeling doesn't leave you, it just softens. Breathe. Malcolm was my friend first, and a client second. He's in good hands. Before we begin, just some preliminary things. This is Malcolm's most recent will as filed with my firm and myself. Hand over any other documents to my firm contrary to this one if you seek to challenge this one. At such time, said will and testament undergoes analysis for validity or potential plagiarism. I see no need to pour over the sections of the will that pertain to your mother since Mrs. Morris, Mr. Calvin Able, and Mr. Zachary Able are the sole inheritors of their parents' joint estate.

CAL

What does that include?

PAUL

Everything, Mr. Able. This house namely, and anything not explicitly named in this will. Mrs. Morris, however, is the *de facto* executor of your father's will as President of the Able Foundation since your mother has already passed away. For the sake of brevity, I'll address the section that bequeaths his personal effects to those present. *To my sister, Alice, I leave you with the sled from our childhood that I had all these years despite my protests to the contrary. For your forgiveness, I entitle you to \$1 million for pain and suffering.*

ALICE

(Under her breath)

Bastard made a joke in his will.

PAUL

*To David Tell, my oldest friend and most trusted companion, I leave you any materials not explicitly given to another person in this will from our expeditions that you find enhances your quality of life. In honor of our friendship, I leave behind \$1 million in the form of grant money to donate as you see fit. To Elaine Morris, my only daughter and oldest child, I leave you the New York apartment you resided in during your college years. In addition, I have already declared my granddaughter, Margaret Morris, as a future selection for the Able Foundation's "Founder's Finest" so that any and all of her college expenses are covered. This will be the case for any of my grandchildren born after the creation of this will, even those born after my death.*

ELLIE

Every grandchild? As in kids I, or Cal and Zach might still have?

PAUL

Yes, ma'am.

ZACH

Think he would pay for me to finish still? Just asking.

PAUL

*To Calvin Able, my oldest son and middle child, I relinquish all stock previously purchased in your company back to you on the condition that your company annually makes charitable donations to any of the following: education, scientific exploration, the arts, the economically disadvantaged, or any other humanitarian cause. To Zachary Able, my youngest child, I leave you the entire contents of my personal office and library, as well as use of it anytime you wish. Additionally, you come into possession of my personal writings, including, but not limited to: my travel logs, expedition logs, personal writings, my unpublished running memoir, and anything else I left incomplete. That reminds me, these are to be delivered to you, Mr. Able.*

(PAUL presents several books to ZACH that had been in her briefcase.)

ZACH

(Sarcastic, obvious frustration)

Wow. And it has a card. It's not millions of dollars in stocks, or a New York penthouse, or even a title bump, but it does have a card with the words "for after" written on the envelope. Thanks, Dad.

CAL

Can you shut up?

ZACH

Want to make me, Cal?

ALICE

Enough. Cal, Zach, both of you.

ZACH

He started it—

ALICE

And I'm finishing it.

PAUL

If I may, there is but a single request made by Malcolm left to address. *To Jane, your bank account will remain active to those parties we have established prior to my passing for the duration of your life, and then for another five years after your own passing.*

ELLIE

Jane? Is that really all it says? No surname?

PAUL

No, Mrs. Morris. Is there a Jane present?

CAL

No one here named Jane, not even their middle name. Has this been a feature in my father's will for a long time?

PAUL

It has survived several codicils. I cannot attest to how long Jane has been mentioned in his personal bequeathing, only that her removal from Malcolm's will was never discussed.

ALICE

Thank you for doing this. My brother and sister in law can rest easier. Would you like to stay for some food or coffee?

PAUL

Thank you, Ms. Able, but I really need to get back to the firm. The forecast for rain does not look promising, so I advise against any travel that can be avoided. I will leave a copy of the entire will with you should anyone else wish to peruse it.

(PAUL and ALICE leave.)

ZACH

Dad loves someone he never bothered to tell us about more than me. And I'm asked why I don't fly in for Christmas.

CAL

Does everything have to be about you, Zach?

ZACH

The offer still stands.

CAL

What?

ZACH

Want to make me shut up? Remember? I'm standing right here, Cal, and I'm not moving.

CAL

So now that Dad's dead you are comfortable standing in his office? I guess that he's dead you aren't afraid of what he might say to you.

ZACH

Do you need a refresher on this will? This office is now mine. And unless you have another document for Dad's attorney to examine I suggest you follow this one. Shouldn't be hard as you

got everything you wanted. “I leave you, my good son, all the stocks I bought from you because I am such a good father!” How many millions did you just inherit?

CAL

I don’t see why anyone misses you, because I don’t. Dad turns down your news outlet idea, so you take it out on everyone who Dad ever gave something to. You think Dad’s money was yours, like he was just a wallet holding it for you. He wasn’t your credit card, buying stuff the second you asked.

ZACH

Didn’t he overpay for you junk stocks rather than make it a true loan? Good son gets whatever he wants because loving dad will rescue him.

CAL

Sure. Blame me. Blame Dad. You refused my help when Dad shot you down. It’s your fault you are a freelance nothing, that you’re alone—

ZACH

Alone? Speaking of alone, I got your Christmas card. Did you forget to stop sending those? Don’t worry, I’ll take them still, long enough to throw away. But in between my usual ritual of the front door to the trash can, I saw that Erica was missing.

ELLIE

Zach, don’t.

ZACH

Nah, we’re just talking about being alone.

ELLIE

Enough, Zachary.

ZACH

This idiot sends out a solo Christmas card, just him and his dog. So where is my sister-in-law? Has she just been parking the car this whole time? Oh, no. She probably is seeing family and you had a business meeting you just couldn’t get out of. It’s been a while since you used that one, Cal. You know what? Save the preplanned excuses, when is the divorce finalized?

CAL

This is the second time at a parent’s funeral that you’ve tried to pick a fight with me. I’m not going to give you what you want, even though I would love to right now I’ve got business to attend to. I’m catching the next flight anyways. My attorney can meet with yours Ellie to hash out Mom and Dad’s estate.

PETE

You can’t fly out, Cal. Didn’t you hear, Paul? The rainfall is too bad. The hurricane is making landfall soon, so it could be days before flights out of here are possible.

CAL

Fine. Mom and Dad left my old room as it was.

(CAL exit through the door as ALICE attempts to reenter.)

ALICE

Cal, where are you going?

(CAL either ignores or simply doesn't hear his aunt.)

ALICE

Zach, what did you do?

ZACH

Me? Why is every fight in this family my fault?

ELLIE

They were both bickering. Cal said Zach was alone and less successful.

ZACH

A freelance nothing.

ELLIE

Zach then brought up the divorce. It wasn't pretty but Zach really didn't start this.

ALICE

Fine. Well, I, for one am hungry. Do you kids want to eat?

PETE

Let me check on Margaret first, Aunt Alice. (To ELLIE) It's okay, stay and talk to your brother.

(PETE exits.)

ALICE

David, food?

DAVID

Yes, of course. I need to eat before taking my medication.

(ALICE and DAVID exit.)

ELLIE

Zach, are you okay?

ZACH

Fine. Kiss Margaret for me. I'll stop by when you're back in New York.



ELLIE

Wait, you're actually leaving? Don't you want to, I don't know, stay? Make use of your inheritance?

ZACH

A bunch of memories about a dead guy that didn't care about me?

ELLIE

That dead guy is our father. And even if you hated him, my heart was ripped from my chest when I got the news.

ZACH

Sorry.

ELLIE

I know. Look, you can't go anywhere. It's pouring rain from the hurricane, so all flights are delayed for the next couple days. You hate long car rides anyways. You did since we were kids.

ZACH

Fine. I'll be in my old room.

ELLIE

Can you listen to me? Do you not appreciate the opportunity you have? Set aside how yours and Dad's relationship was so...what it was. This is rare privilege to delve into the life of a reclusive millionaire. Think about it, this man—

ZACH

Dad.

ELLIE

Malcolm Able, the man. Here is a man that never published his own memoirs but the world clamored to know more. You could easily sell these to the foundation or even Dad's alma mater as unedited works if you don't want to revise them for the public. Or you could even find a publisher that would pay you handsomely. Wash your hands of Dad and the man he was—

ZACH

I get that you can forgive him for being absent, that you might think he's a saint for the promotions he gave you—

ELLIE

Hey, I earned those. I haven't been handed any more than you.

ZACH

You're right. Sorry.

ELLIE

Look, Dad was flawed, and so was Malcolm. He wasn't perfect in any aspect of his life, and now you have an opportunity to show people that.

ZACH

You think I am capable of such bias reporting?

ELLIE

No, which is why I think you should write the story. Think of this as your inheritance. The chance to crack the vault on the modern explorer.

ZACH

There is this "Jane" woman that is going to be in the headlines.

ELLIE

Yeah? That's piqued your interest, it's obvious.

ZACH

Well, yeah. I mean, do you know who she is?

ELLIE

No.

ZACH

Probably nothing. Or maybe it's some scandal. (Beat) Damn. Okay, so looking into that might be worth the couple days I have to stay here.

ELLIE

And think about the access you have. You're his son, you're in possession of his library and any personal papers in his vaults, you can interview his longtime companion, his sister. And you can have any document from the Able Foundation in the time it takes my secretary to find, scan, and email it.

ZACH

You'd do that? Then there's a catch. No source offers that much without some kind of *quid pro quo* lurking behind their selflessness.

ELLIE

You're good at this intuition thing. Fine. I have selfish reasons. This Jane woman or person or group scares me. A mystery appears in Dad's will that is granting access to an unspecified sum of money to an unspecified sum of people. I think the sooner we can find out who or what this Jane is, the better.

ZACH

There's got to be something in his ledgers or something tied to his foundation accounts.

ELLIE

You don't know, do you? Large sums of Dad's wealth is scattered all over the world in various currencies. He made incredible discoveries but was it enough to justify his wealth? Our grandparents weren't wealthy. So how does he amass this fortune? No one is entirely sure how he made it all, and some of it we may never know.

ZACH

Swiss bank accounts?

ELLIE

Exactly. We aren't getting into those without some maneuvering. And even if we can't, there likely exists a preponderance of circumstantial evidence. Who better to find it as I don't know anyone better at investigative journalism than my little brother.

ZACH

You're good. But not good enough. There's more you're not telling me. If you expect a partnership then I need everything you know.

ELLIE

Okay. Fine. Dad's private accounts are being shut down and consolidated into the Able Foundation. He has money tied up in Switzerland, yes, but he has small fortunes in several nations he had expeditions in.

ZACH

How do you know this? It can't just be that you're president.

ELLIE

I've already read Dad's will, which I had access to because I was president. All the money seems to add up, except one outlier.

ZACH

Jane.

ELLIE

Exactly. And it's a Swiss bank account, so we can't gain access to any records even if we wanted to. But I can't wait around hoping this account is not tied to anything illegal, and maybe you can decide if Dad's money that is being transferred is legitimate. My biggest fear is some sort of money laundering could be in the works, and I am not going to prison for activities I knew nothing about.

ZACH

You know that without such access that we are expecting a case based on circumstantial evidence, right? Maybe there is enough here to piece together a substantial argument.

ELLIE

Just worry about Jane, whoever she is. The foundation will pour over his bank accounts that we are given access to before the money is to be doled out according to Dad's will. Legal will find any impropriety.

ZACH

Wait, is that also in his will?

ELLIE

Yeah, Dad's fortune is estimated as high as \$200 million. We merely went over his personal bequeathing.

ZACH

Fine. I'll see what I can find. But as soon as the rain breaks, I reserve the right to catch the first flight out of here.

ELLIE

Thanks, little brother. I'll be around all day tomorrow if I can assist you. We might be forced to wait as my assistants pull files from the foundation, but I'll offer anything I have access to. Oh, you must have dropped this. Looks like a card.

ZACH

Maybe it's Dad's?

ELLIE

Just says "for after", doesn't say who it's to.

ZACH

Maybe after I finish this log? Kiss Margaret for me.

END SCENE.

ACT I  
Scene 2

(This is the first expedition. It can be staged at the director's discretion. This means on the apron, upstage left/right/center, or even using the office as a backdrop. Any flashback can be used in a similar manner, but consistency will inform the audience of these time hops. ZACH can either remain at the desk reading or may be interactive with any of the memories, maybe even reader's theatre style—the playwright trusts you.)

ZACH

*August 15<sup>th</sup>: Plane delays are dreadful, but gave Candi and I time to shop for desks. She insists I finally vacate her office and set up camp in my own. David agreed to hold the cab as we waited for our flight.*

CANDICE

What about...this one?

MALCOLM

It's nice.

CANDICE

But not for you.

MALCOLM

I didn't say that.

CANDICE

You said it about the last three desks I suggested.

MALCOLM

Ah.

CANDICE

We are getting one today. I'm tired of being kicked out of my own writing space.

MALCOLM

I like your desk.

CANDICE

No, it's because I have a desk. If you really liked it, I offered to buy you the same one for your office.

MALCOLM

If you buy me one then I have more availability I write, and I write based on inspiration.

CANDICE

Great writers write because they have to.

MALCOLM

It's a calling

CANDICE

Yes, it's the publisher on the phone; your deadline is approaching. Fine. I'll pretend you have taste in desks. Oh, and here's David. David, what do you think of this desk for Malcolm?

DAVID

It's not really Malcolm, honestly.

CANDICE

Okay, perhaps you have taste after all.

DAVID

Malcolm, the driver is here. Don't worry, Candice, I'll return in one piece.

CANDICE

That's certainly comforting. Can you assure the father of my child does the same?

DAVID

I'll try.

CANDICE

So when can I expect you back? And don't say on schedule, you're likely to take an extra month for even implying that.

MALCOLM

I'll try my best to finish on schedule. I always try, that much I can promise.

CANDICE

Sometimes I'd prefer a rival of flesh and blood.

MALCOLM

Kiss Elaine for me.

ZACH

*August 18<sup>th</sup>: We landed! After seeing the King Tut exhibit two years ago at the university, I dreamed of standing in the Valley of the Kings. Our crew has set up camp in the southern part of the valley. Here we are searching for a potentially lost tomb, the final resting place of worshippers Isis and Nephthys, the goddesses of the earth and of funerary. Twin goddesses, linked forever. Our guide speaks broken English so a translator has relayed to David and I that we will do best to use little explosives to uncover any tombs that might remain. This is our usual method, to be as least destructive as possible. We are also told that another expedition has landed in our area. Some kind of mix up with the Egyptian government.*

DAVID

Should we try to make the best of it? Split the digging and credit between our two crews?

MALCOLM

I am willing to try.

ZACH

*Our accompanying explorers are EXPLORER and are suspicious of our presence, like we intentionally fooled the Egyptians into scheduling us at the same site to thwart their plans.*

DAVID

Greetings, friends. My name is Dr. David Tell, this is Dr. Malcolm Able. We are heading the American expedition.

(DAVID extends a hand which the three EXPLORERS do not accept.)

MALCOLM

I've privately financed our expedition, but we represent the University of Mount Appalachia. We hope not to interfere with your endeavors but we see no reason not to be cordial.

(An awkward silence from the EXPLORERS persists.)

MALCOLM

Right.

ZACH

*August 25<sup>th</sup>: We have shared a tent with the three lead EXPLORER explorers. Their crew seems to like additional diggers from our side. Most speak wonderful English, and tell us their leaders do not trust us still so they speak only in EXPLORER to annoy us. This has proven entertaining because David is fluent in EXPLORER, and I am conversational.*

EXPLORER 1

Wie können wir die Grabmale finden, ohne sie wissen zu lassen? Seit einer Woche haben sie uns nicht aus den Augen gelassen.

(Translation: How do we find the tombs without letting them know? It has been a week and they won't let us out of their sites.)

EXPLORER 2

Vielleicht werfen wir ihre Werkzeuge in den Nil, und sie denken, dass sie gestohlen wurden?  
(Translation: Maybe we throw their tools into the Nile, make them think it was stolen?)

MALCOLM

Are they really discussing this?

DAVID

If they even try it...

EXPLORER 3

Schau Tell an. Siehst du ihn? Er schaut hier  
(Translation: Look at Tell, see him? Looking over here.)

EXPLORER 1

Macht nichts. Wir haben viel zu tun.  
(Translation: Ignore him, we have to get back to the planning.)

DAVID

Wir verstehen Deutsch, wenn sie bevorzugen.  
(Translation: We understand German, if you prefer.)

(The explorers go quiet.)

MALCOLM

Oh, now they acknowledge us.

EXPLORER 1

You could...

MALCOLM

Yes. More so him, I am a beginner.

DAVID

So, would you rather talk to us in English, as your crew says you can, or need we speak a language you three don't know?

MALCOLM

David is polylingual so stay away from Spanish, French, and Mandarin as well.

ZACH



*Now that the jig was up, the EXPLORERS have become a team of sorts with David and me. We find that each have a similar goal: discover and preserve an authentic mummification from any tomb regarded as lost in the area.*

MALCOLM

I am sure we are in a good spot. The government says this is not a heavily searched area to begin with.

EXPLORER 1

And when we do find something, how should we credit it?

DAVID

In EXPLORER and otherwise European publications where English is not the first language then you three may put your names first? Or perhaps alphabetically?

EXPLORER 2

I am fine with either. I want to find something before we assign our credits.

ZACH

*Over time we began to bond.*

MALCOLM

I only have one child now. Here's a picture of my Ellie.

EXPLORER 3

She's got your smile.

MALCOLM

Her mother says that, too. I've never been so proud of anything as I am in raising her. Sometimes makes you wonder if you deserve such happiness.

EXPLORER 3

I know what you mean. I have babies of my own. Here they are. Twins, forever linked. Just like our Isis and Nephthys. Almost like life and death.

MALCOLM

Two things inexplicably linked.

EXPLORER 3

The entire reason you and I are here.

ZACH

*September 1<sup>st</sup>: We have entered a mass grave. Sarcophagi line the tomb. Grave robbers have looted whatever gold might have been in here. We find personal effects strewn about as though hastily disturbed centuries ago.*

MALCOLM

The stillness...It feels like the plunderers just left with the gold...

EXPLORER 2

By the looks of it, none of these were retainer sacrifices. The practice of sacrificing the servants to aid a pharaoh in the afterlife.

DAVID

How can you tell?

EXPLORER 1

Hieroglyphics. And that died out in the First Dynasty. We are dealing with a Nineteenth Dynasty burial.

EXPLORER 3

Who do you think these people are then?

MALCOLM

We'll give them back their names.

END SCENE

ACT I  
Scene 3

(ALICE enters reading the morning paper.)

ALICE

*No explorer in living memory has personified the word discovery like Dr. Malcolm Able.*

ZACH

The morning edition editor thought that was a good line? No wonder print is dying.

ALICE

*For an explorer who refused to open a museum, Dr. Able's discoveries attract countless visitors in their new homes. Perhaps the number of patrons rival the millions paid to Dr. Able by foreign heads of states and collectors for the treasures he found. Dr. Able had no shortage of critics with his decision to profit off the greatest discoveries in the past two centuries.*

ZACH

But the author conveniently leaves out how much Dad gave away in charity. Any mention of how many first-generation college students Dad created through the Able Foundation?

ALICE

Zachary, do I detect a defensive tone?

ZACH

For Malcolm? No. I just prefer balanced journalism. I criticized their poor writing, remember?

ALICE

You did.

(ALICE places the newspaper on top of the desk for ZACH to see.)

ALICE

Right here, see? Your father's good deeds are not forgotten. But we all expect you to write an even better article once you crack who Jane is. And yes, second to last paragraph on the right column. This paper has gotten whiff of this mysterious Jane.

ZACH

Only one mention of David in the entire piece. It's like they forget he was Dad's partner just because Dad was financing the expeditions or had a foundation named after himself.

ALICE

There's my nephew. Did you sleep okay?

ZACH

I was out after reading one of Dad's logs.

ALICE

That bad?

ZACH

No, actually. He wasn't writing this like it was about be published, but it's not bad for a personal memoir.

ALICE

So you think he was never meaning to publish these works still?

ZACH

Maybe. He wasn't quite the author Mom was, but he didn't have to be.

ALICE

It helps that he had David's pen for all the academic hoo-ha that never interested you.

ZACH

I just prefer current events, nothing personal. And how is David?

ALICE

We all saw your father's death coming. Cancer doesn't exactly sneak up on once diagnosed. We saw it eat away at Malcolm. So David is devastated by your father's absence, but he's calm. Any leads on Jane?

ZACH

Well, I had Paul send over the codicils from Dad's will over the years. There are dozens of amendments, mostly financial stuff. A couple on the personal bequeaths, but Jane has never left the pages. And there was something in Dad's journals. It makes me suspect that Dad had an affair. Jane might be a nickname or for her anonymity. Maybe she's the mother of a lovechild. But when Mom and Dad were shopping, she said something he thought to include. Mom joked about preferring a rival of flesh and blood. Maybe I wouldn't think anything of it but when Dad was confronted by Mom about an affair after Ellie, Cal, and I were already grown, Dad couldn't deny it by Mom's account.

ALICE

She never mentioned such a confrontation to me. When did you hear about this?

ZACH

I didn't, I read about it in Mom's diary, after she died, of course.

ALICE

What were you looking for?

ZACH

Something alluding to an affair.

ALICE

And you're sure you found it? So soon?

ZACH

When you know what you're looking for it isn't hard.

(ZACH hands ALICE the dairy, and she begins to read.)

CANDICE

Malcolm, you left your briefcase in the living room. When I was cleaning it got knocked over, and this fell out.

MALCOLM

Yes. Thank you, Candi.

CANDICE

It's a bank statement.

MALCOLM

Yes. I shouldn't leave such things laying around.

CANDICE

You didn't, but I shouldn't have to find out about you hoarding half a million dollars in a private account. And it appears you made a deposit of another \$100,000.

MALCOLM

Candice, I have accounts set up in banks the world over, I can't be expected to tell you about every transaction.

CANDICE

Name an account I haven't been made privy to before this one. In twenty-one years of marriage I am only now finding out that you have a small fortune set aside in an account I feel has been deliberately withheld from me. (Beat) Is this her?

MALCOLM

What?

CANDICE

A rival of flesh and blood.

MALCOLM

Candi, I could never... We have raised three children together, we built a home together, a life together.

CANDICE

Together? You were routinely absent from those children, this home, this marriage.

MALCOLM

That isn't fair.

CANDICE

Fair? Is it fair to find out you were hiding money from me in such large amounts? Put yourself in my place, then tell me you wouldn't be suspicious.

MALCOLM

Suspicious for what?

CANDICE

You were gone, sometimes months at a time, and this was a frequent aspect of our marriage.

MALCOLM

And how often were you called away for book signings and conferences? It goes both ways, but I am not the one throwing it in your face.

CANDICE

When were allegations of infidelity made about me?

MALCOLM

Candice, how do I convince you?

CANDICE

Explain this account.

MALCOLM

I can't.

CANDICE

And why not—

MALCOLM

You who knows everything about me should appreciate the magnitude of my silence. I could tell you the worst of my life, but this moment...Candice, I swear on the lives of our children...

CANDICE

Malcolm...Okay. We...we can address this another time.

ALICE

I cannot attest to this argument between in your parents. I never questioned your mother's account of things. Your mother was the finest woman I ever met. If her diaries say that she had no idea who this Jane figure is, then I believe her. Do you still think this Jane was an affair your father had?

ZACH

I don't know. There was always rumors about Dad marrying Mom for her family's money. It did finance many his first explorations. And then there's how Dad could be a flirt. It was never inappropriate, like sexual harassment, but it didn't look good coming from a married man.

ALICE

I can also assure you that were I ever made aware of any infidelity regarding your father, I wouldn't have held my tongue.

ZACH

I wouldn't expect you to.

ALICE

Not just because I'm your loudmouth aunt; I wouldn't have let him get away with hurting your mother or you kids. I adored Candi, and you three are my babies.

ZACH

Alice, I'm—

ALICE

I know how old you are, doesn't change that.

END SCENE

ACT I  
Scene 4

(In the house.)

ZACH

Hello?

NORA

Hello! I didn't mean to intrude. The man at the gate let me in, said the front door should be open.

ZACH

Are you with the press?

NORA

No, I'm...wait, you're Zach Able.

ZACH

Have we met?

NORA

No, I recognize you from your picture. Your article about mining conditions in West Virginia is right in my backyard. I knew two of the miners in the collapse; we went to high school together.

ZACH

That truly was a tragedy. You could say it was my break, about as big a break I've gotten. Still freelance.

NORA

You're due for a bigger break.

ZACH

Always pleased to meet a fan. What can I do for you, miss...?

NORA

James, Nora James. And it's Mrs. as of three weeks ago.

ZACH

Congratulations, that's wonderful. So what can I do for you, Mrs. James?

NORA

I'm here to offer my own, more recent sympathies.

ZACH

Ah, yes. Thank you.



NORA

It is always tragic to lose a father no matter how long and fulfilling their life was.

ZACH

Sounds like something in the news. Are you sure you're not in the media?

NORA

No, you're the only journalist in the room. I recently completed medical school. I wanted to offer my condolences before my husband and I leave for my residency.

ZACH

Is he in the media?

NORA

He's an accountant. I am just a family friend. My father worked for your father's foundation before he passed away when I seven years old. Your father funded my medical school research through his foundation.

ZACH

More congratulations then, Dr. James. Your mother, line of work is she in?

NORA

She is retired from a long career in hotels. Your father actually gave her a reference. She began as a receptionist but ended up managing the same place your father started her out at. She recently had a hip replacement, or she would be here now.

ZACH

What's her name? Maybe we've met.

NORA

Vanessa.

ZACH

(Realizing it isn't Jane.)

No, can't say I've met her. I'd very much like to meet her.

NORA

Maybe next time. Well, I should be going, Zach.

ZACH

Thank you for the visit, Dr. James. (Beat) Your middle name wouldn't be...

NORA

Excuse me?

ZACH

Nothing.

NORA

Nora is my middle name, my first name is Samantha.

ZACH

I see. Good luck with your residency, Dr. James.

NORA

Good luck with the writing, I'll meet you again there, surely.

END SCENE

ACT I  
Scene 5

ZACH

*June 11<sup>th</sup>: After a two day hike, our guide led us to the base of the site. We would be digging out the mountainside. The tribe knew what the outside world didn't; this mountainside was just dirt and grass. It made a hill that reclaimed the tomb built near the mountain. Ancient tales say it burrowed into the mountain, so explosives might open up the entrance faster but could also destroy the mythical tomb inside. Tomorrow we will settle for backhoes, shovels, and anything noninvasive.*

*June 12<sup>th</sup>: The sounds of machinery meant that our conversations were close-knit; we stood right next to each other to hear over them. Everything on that first day were shouts.*

MALCOLM

I want great care taken after we reach five feet dug out of this hill.

DAVID

Do you think we will reach the entrance that soon?

MALCOLM

Doubtful. What I expect is we could find the king's servants buried at the mouth of the tomb, if it even exists. But should we find them I want great care taken to preserve them as they rest.

DAVID

Do you know why servants were buried outside the tomb?

MALCOLM

What?

DAVID

I said, "why are the servants—?"

MALCOLM

Let's get out of here. Your tent is closer.

(MALCOLM and DAVID adjourn to DAVID's tent for tea.)

DAVID

Here, Mal, soothes the throat. I can understand the need for the machinery but I cannot get used to the shouting. Anyways. The burials proceeding the tomb, what might have been their reason?

MALCOLM

It could be any number of reasons. I think that it could be similar to our friends in Egypt, the retainer sacrifices. We cannot be sure of what happened to those buried outside the tomb, if they even were.

DAVID

Like you, I thought the rumors could at least be true, and were these servants or warriors buried outside it was to serve their fallen king. These ancient civilizations all seem to have believed in service to their dead.

MALCOLM

Do you think we have lost that sense of service today?

DAVID

Hardly. You and I are here, are we not? These might not be our dead, but we serve their memory. Don't you insist that we never disturb their rest, as you call it? This dig is to honor the history of this tribe, to better complete the tapestry of their culture. It satisfies their needs but it honors our pursuit of anthropological discovery. This applies back home, where we still build monuments to our dead. Presidents and kings still have monuments that rival those of the pharaoh.

MALCOLM

What about those who aren't given the recognition? What about those who die without a proper burial, or whose death only aggrandized someone far less worthy?

DAVID

Like the king?

MALCOLM

Sure, or whoever we, the living, glorify like king.

DAVID

Malcolm, that's why we're here. The small rocks every six feet or so that you swear are the burial plots of servants are why the excavation is taking a week longer. Men like you who insist we honor those without a name are how we honor the dead more fully. What has brought on these thoughts?

MALCOLM

Just that, just thoughts. Thank you for the tea, David. It was wonderful.

DAVID

It's cold, Mal.

MALCOLM

Right. You insist I drink this stuff, I insist that I can't bring myself to it. The cycle repeats. Tomorrow we should be ready to make our first exhumation, I imagine. We can see if anything lies beneath those markers.

DAVID

Let's hope it was not for nothing. The dig is behind schedule again. We appear to have an affinity for these things.

MALCOLM

I'll deal with the men's agitation, I always do. I'll have to call Candice. After this many times, I'm sure she expects it.

DAVID

With a toddler, I doubt she will appreciate you being gone any longer than you originally told her. How is baby Zachary, anyways?

ZACH

*June 13<sup>th</sup>: As expected, we make our first exhumation. The discovery would already be momentous since we are all but sure the tomb exists now. Our find is more important now that we have uncovered the resting remains outside the king's tomb to discover something truly remarkable.*

(MALCOLM and DAVID are kneeling over a dig site.)

DAVID

I can see it now, these bones...they're...

MALCOLM

Elderly. They're elderly by the looks of it. This means this tribe, they didn't—

DAVID

They weren't executing their able-bodied! These buried outside the tomb lived out their lives before joining the king in the afterlife. Those buried here, servants or warriors or family, they were buried here, perhaps as an honor? This proximity...

MALCOLM

Yes, an honor. Not just for those out here. It is an honor for the king to be welcomed into the afterlife by those he served. Yes, he served. A king is but the greatest public servant. No, these resting here were served by him, and they welcomed him, with forgiveness...

DAVID

Forgiveness? Mal, are you feeling okay?

MALCOLM

Did I say forgiveness? Must be the heat.

DAVID

Certainly. Have you any other thoughts?

MALCOLM

Suspensions. What think you, Dave?

DAVID

Forgive me if I do not share the same sense of civic engagement that monarchs hold over their subjects. Regardless of that, it appears these men, maybe even women, were placed here after

living a lengthy life. Lengthy by their ancient standards. Their purpose is to serve, surely. They could be family. But it is not an accident. Look at the sheer number, the uniformity of their placement. To be buried like this, at the base of the tomb was intentional. When we are sure we've uncovered everyone we can ask the tribe, their elders, to see if this is in keeping with anything they know.

MALCOLM

Brilliance, your usual work, David. Let's get back to work.

ZACH

*June 14<sup>th</sup>: My orders were explicitly disobeyed. Explosives were used, albeit fifty meters from the base of the dig. Those responsible said explosives were necessary to make room for incoming equipment needed to excavate the actual tomb.*

MALCOLM

Who? I want to know right now who did this.

DAVID

It was Foster, the foreman. He manages the miners we hired for this dig. His explanation was that we were so far behind that it would cost them work back in the states.

MALCOLM

So he's granted himself clearance to operate an explosive agent?

DAVID

He has been trained in their use, Malcolm. It was part of the reason we hired him.

MALCOLM

Yes, David, I can recall that portion of his resume. That is the least of my concerns.

DAVID

Then what is your concern? The chief has been forgiving, and no one was hurt. I am sure whatever we find inside that tomb will retain its value seeing as the blast was far enough away.

MALCOLM

It isn't just the money, David. We have no idea what we are heading into. Those at rest in or surrounding the tomb, their remains...

DAVID

The blast was removed from the burials, almost on the other side of the mountain.

MALCOLM

Then I will trust the tomb is safe enough to enter. Let's keep to schedule before this Foster blows the entire mountain apart.

ZACH

*June 16<sup>th</sup>: The cavernous tomb burrows into the mountainside, being blocked by a stone slab. The chief was meant to be given the first venture inside the tomb with his sons, but ancient writing on the slab is regarded as curse. The chief refuses to be the first to enter even after the barrier was removed.*

DAVID

Are you seriously considering this curse?

MALCOLM

Keep your damned voice down!

DAVID

How often have we ventured into booby-trapped tombs? The curses of Egypt were ever present and not once have you paid that any mind.

MALCOLM

I don't buy these notions. We've faced down the wrath of religious curses the world over. None of them work. But we cannot show open disregard for their beliefs, not after Foster. Fine. We will still enter, but we enter first. And we must do it in a manner that does not disregard their fear of these curses.

DAVID

The high priestess; we gained great favor in her when we uncovered her ancestor's remains.

MALCOLM

Yes, of course. She can bless our entrance. Where would I be without you, Dave?

DAVID

Perhaps you'd be the most popular professor at our university instead of the second.

MALCOLM

I'm second now, as opposed to whom? Ah...

ZACH

*The decision to enter immediately after the high priestess's blessing was made, meaning our team had to be prepped.*

DAVID

Any other questions? Jacobs, yes?

EXPLORER 1

Yes, thank you, Dr. Tell. Now that the tomb is open, how long will it take to photograph and catalog the contents within?

DAVID

Neither Dr. Able or myself have ventured into the tomb yet so we can only speculate, but as we speak, lights are being set up inside the tomb so that we may begin working immediately after this meeting.

EXPLORER 2

Can we be sure that the tomb's structural integrity was not compromised from the recent explosions?

DAVID

We are confident that the tomb is secure since the blast was some fifty meters away from the base of the mountain.

MALCOLM

The mining team is already agitated by the delays in our expedition. The sooner we excavate, the better it will be for everyone.

EXPLORER 2

Dr. Able, it wouldn't be an imposition if you would like for me to reinforce the walls or at the very least inspect the tomb before we send anyone else in there.

MALCOLM

That won't be necessary, Elliot. Remember, time is of the essence here. And if there is nothing else, you are all free to gather whatever you need for the tomb.

(EXPLORER 1 and EXPLORER 2 exit. EXPLORER 3 approaches MALCOLM and DAVID.)

MALCOLM

Can I help you...

EXPLORER 3

Wayne, sir. But everyone just calls me Nesmith.

MALCOLM

Mr. Nesmith, what can I do for you?

EXPLORER 3

I'm just one of the miners, Dr. Able. No need for the sir. But uh, I was assigned by Foster to help with carrying and lifting anything you might need taken from the tomb. Rest of the guys are at lunch after setting up your lights.

MALCOLM

Were you apart of the explosives being detonated?

DAVID

Malcolm.



EXPLORER 3

I was there, if that's what you mean, sir. But I didn't set nothing off, honest. I haven't be trained to do it right. I'm just here to lift heavy stuff so I can support a wife and kid.

MALCOLM

And you do a fine job it, I'm sure. I apologize for my rudeness.

EXPLORER 3

No hard feelings, boss. I'll get my stuff.

(MALCOLM must leave the tomb area during the monologue to begin writing in journal.)

ZACH

*And so we journeyed into the depths of the earth, to a place until yesterday no mortal had ventured in centuries. The king had his worldly possessions strewn about the room. This was not a vault of extravagant wealth the king sought to bring with him. No, this was a practical man that sought to bring into the afterlife things which pleased him. A small dais lined the wall, no doubt one he used in life, perhaps his favorite. Traditional hunting equipment sat along the opposing side. Clothing was piled at the opposite end. These were modest garments (robes, loincloths, sandals) that made it feel like the king wished to enter the next life as an ordinary man. And there, at the center, his sarcophagus. It had a large stone slab on top that had been intentionally smoothed. It was supported by four stones planted into the ground. By the looks of it, no internal base existed, meaning the king was laid to rest on the ground. All this only invites new questions, the foremost being why this king? This tribe abandoned this sacred burial not long after the king's burial if the legends are true. The tribe returned generations later...*

MALCOLM

*So why put all this effort into a single burial? What made this king worthy of such attention?*

DAVID

(Frantic, out of breath.)

Malcolm!

MALCOLM

David, you know I prefer the silence of the tomb when I write, so this better be--

DAVID

The tomb...

MALCOLM

What did we find?

DAVID

No, not that. It's collapsing.

MALCOLM

Are our people out?

DAVID

I can't say, I just heard the alarm.

(MALCOLM makes a run toward the tomb. DAVID follows suit. The cries of pain and for help intermingle.)

MALCOLM

No! God, no!

(When it is evident that the tomb is caving in, DAVID pulls MALCOLM away from the screams.)

DAVID

Malcolm, stop!

(Additional rocks fall, echoing on the other side of the collapsed tomb.)

DAVID

Mal, we have to get out now. Now! The tunnel could be next!

(DAVID is dragging a defeated MALCOLM, who only at the end take charge of his own escape. When the scene picks up, DAVID and MALCOLM are sitting in DAVID's tent.)

DAVID

I just spoke with the chief. No one blames us. It is likely because the backhoes and things rolled back over the blast site. It probably shifted everything. Or it was boobytrapped. But the tribe, they don't blame us. They are convinced it was the curse, that you were spared because of the high priestess's favor.

MALCOLM

I should be in there.

DAVID

Malcolm?

MALCOLM

I ignored the dangers.

DAVID

Malcolm.

MALCOLM

I said I was sending them into a collapse just waiting to happen!

DAVID

Malcolm-

MALCOLM

I got three people killed! Jacobs just completed his PhD work, hardly even 30 years old. And Elliot was an engineer. The entire dig was by his design, who is now dead because of my decisions. And Nesmith, he said he had a wife and a child. He was just a poor miner who got caught up in all of this, where we exploit people by digging in their sacred lands, ignoring their culture. Maybe we are cursed. A million curses from the dozens of digs where we exploited people for our own satiation. It is only now that our curses have fallen squarely onto our shoulders, that we pay the price for our foolishness.

DAVID

We were asked by the tribe and by the national government, alike. We spent years communicating and translating their desires. Everything was planned to the letter, except one mistake made outside our doing.

MALCOLM

But I still sent them in there. I did that.

DAVID

We agreed, you and I. This is just as much on me, Malcolm.

MALCOLM

I sent him into danger. I knowingly sent a father into death. His child will never know the full potential of their father's love because of me. I did that. The Bible, what does it say, the sins of the father? Nesmith's child are paying for my sins, not their father's. And what of my children? How do I look them in the face knowing that babies just like them are never going to be held or kissed or fed by their own fathers because my own vanity said that this time would be different? That this time I wouldn't get three people killed?

DAVID

Mal, what are you talking about?

MALCOLM

Nothing. Just what we were saying.

DAVID

I promise you that this burden is not yours alone. Any investigation that stems from this is one that we will face together. The fault lies just as squarely on my shoulders as yours, and I won't let you hate yourself for this. We weren't trying to sell anything this time, this dig was purely for knowledge, for academe.

MALCOLM

Always trying to make me feel better. I need Nesmith's information, get in touch with his wife.

DAVID

Let me. Stay here.

(DAVID exits. MALCOLM picks up his journal to write before exiting.  
ZACH is left on stage.)

ZACH

*I deserve to die.*

END SCENE.

END OF ACT I

ACT II  
Scene 1

(ZACH is standing stock-still, as if the fight with his father just unfolded again. ZACH's emotions finally boil over with his grief pouring out. It is a violent mess as ZACH begins destroying the office.)

ZACH

If you never loved me, that's fine. But don't make me read these stupid books, Dad. Don't make me read these like I will understand you any better. You could have just told me you hated me. But no! Malcolm Able makes me sit in his stupid office with his stupid books that he told more than his own son! That's cool, though. Because maybe you told me who Jane is in these damn pages, but you still never told me!

(ZACH collapses in his grief. He remains here in heap as CAL enters, looking for the source of the noises he heard.)

CAL

What is going-? Are you kidding? No, this is a damn joke, isn't it? You destroy Dad's office just proves how little-

(CAL sees that ZACH is finally mourning their father's death.)

CAL

Woah. Z, are you okay?

ZACH

Yeah. Sorry, didn't mean to...

CAL

No, it's okay. Let me help you pick up.

ZACH

You haven't called me Z since we were kids.

CAL

I haven't seen you... Any luck with Jane?

ZACH

No. I can't find anything in Dad's journals about anyone with a "J" name even. Ellie is pulling files out the foundation.

CAL

Maybe I can help. Any leads?

ZACH

Well, I suspect it could be a few things. Jane might be a front for money laundering. Dad has money spread in banks the world over. Or maybe a way to pay off local governments for explorations. I can't tell until I get my hand on some kind ledger, but that might not give anything if he's any good at covering his tracks. No, I think it is most likely an affair. Maybe money to the mother of a lovechild. Maybe multiple women.

CAL

Dad having affairs. Nah, I don't buy it.

ZACH

Come on, think about it. Ellie says she saw him flirt at the foundation; we both saw things like that growing up. He was always gone so he had ample chance.

CAL

Dad put Mom on such a pedestal when he was home.

ZACH

Classic sign of someone making up for an affair.

CAL

Eh, I just, I just don't buy it. Dad as an adulterer, I just don't see it.

ZACH

And you can attest to adultery patterns because you are one?

CAL

Yeah, actually. Hence the Christmas card with my dog you threw away.

ZACH

Cal, I didn't...

CAL

Yeah, you did. I'm not saying I don't think you're good, I just don't...Zach, I'm not your enemy, okay? I always believed in you. I tried investing in you, but you didn't want it. Can we at least have a conversation where we don't fight?

ZACH

This one is on me. You've been trying.

CAL

Yeah. I guess we are all on edge with...everything. I still can't accept it, I suppose. Maybe shock isn't the right phrase. He was sick for years, so it wasn't exactly a surprise when his body just couldn't keep keeping up. I think it's being back in this place, this house. He filled it with such life our entire childhood. There was always a difference when he came back.

ZACH

Is it wrong for me to say that I almost preferred when he left? Wow. Saying that out loud, yeah. It does sound horrible given that he just...

CAL

Just died. You don't have to say it until you're ready. I don't think I'm ready but I'm making myself. I'm trying to give myself that closure. (Beat) It's okay that you didn't get along, or that you didn't mind him being out of the house. Sometimes I liked it, too. Mom let us get away with more.

ZACH

She did. Remember how Dad would stop us from climbing trees or playing in the caves in the area.

CAL

He was always afraid we would fall out or fall in. Which we did. That was probably the best summer we had. Remember? We made the neighbor kids follow us into the expeditions you dreamed up.

ZACH

I was your kid brother but you let me lead.

CAL

You had better ideas. And I could tell you were having fun so why not play along.

ZACH

Why did you stop playing with us?

CAL

We had to, remember? That was about the time that the neighbor kid, what was his name, Shane? He got lost in the cave for two hours. Dad screamed at you and me, told us we could never go into the caves again. Dad said I was the older brother, so I should have been more responsible.

ZACH

When he learned it was my idea I got it even worse. This whole discussion about the dangers of falling in, avalanches. I hated you both for it.

CAL

Me?

ZACH

Yeah. You, because you just let me take the fall. I know it sounds stupid but I think I resented you every day since then.

CAL

And Dad?

ZACH

Dad pissed me off because here I was, what? Seven or eight? He's telling me not go cave diving but he literally walks into booby-trapped pits for a living. I only see this as hypocrisy coming from him, a man who has broken his back from falling down a mountain.

CAL

Twice, at least.

ZACH

Twice, at least! There you go! Was it twice by that point? When did Dad go to the Spider Forest?

CAL

When did he go? I think I was 17. It had to have been; I was going to prom, and Mom was mad that Dad was away when my date and I were taking pictures. She got the call about his fall, and immediately rushed off without mentioning her anger again.

ZACH

So it was only once when we were kids? Then when did he fall the first time?

CAL

He was cave diving, go figure. That's probably what started the paranoia for him about us falling in. It was maybe a year before you took us in so I doubt you remember much. Dad went spelunking deep into Bluford's Cave. Blu's was the same cave you and I played in as children when we were caught by Dad, and granted we stayed around the mouth. But not Dad, never Dad. He said he was trying to find where the cave's bottom was. It apparently has a gaping hole that legend says falls straight into Hell.

ZACH

To Hell?

CAL

Come on, you remember the stories from when we were kids. The myth about people hiding pirates treasure down there, that bad children would fall to their death trying to find it. Dead Kids Cave was what we always called it.

ZACH

Oh yeah, and Dad said that he didn't want us to end up like the kids in the stories. I always thought he had heard them growing up in this area but he wouldn't talk about the cave. So what else happened to Dad in his story?

CAL

Well I always expected he was doing research. Rumors of treasure and ghost stories of dead kids wouldn't have appealed to him much, but I think he wanted to offer more understanding to our community by finding out what, if anything was at the base of the cave, if it even had one that could be found. What is so uncharacteristic for Dad is that he went alone.



ZACH

He what?

CAL

Yeah, our safety-first father dove down into a cave alone. It's a good thing, too, because the ledge he landed on only had room for him. If even one more person went then he, they, or both would have died. The fall came from his grip slipping; his rope must have been wet he said, because he lost his grip and plummeted into the darkness. He said from his vantage point, the light from the outside was merely a pinpoint. He wasn't sure how injured his back was, just that the pain was excruciating, and he was going to pass out. He sent up the distress signal on his navigator that he always had. Dad says he woke up to his expedition team lifting him by a hanging stretcher apparatus...thing. I don't know the name of it.

ZACH

And us just being near the cave was dangerous. The nerve of him to berate a child for being curious. I was smart enough not to go alone, which is all he ever said. But he does that? The famous explorer, the modern-day Magellan, does something that stupid. How did you hear about this? I haven't seen that in Dad's writings yet.

CAL

He told me...about a month ago. He wanted to tell us both, but you weren't answering my calls.

ZACH

I...I was on assignment, covering a corporate merger.

CAL

We knew, we didn't blame you.

ZACH

You knew? I hadn't spoken to either of you in years.

CAL

Your articles. Dad collected them all. We would read everything you wrote together. Especially at the end there, Dad was determined to read everything you wrote. In the last few months, Dad was reading them all. He particularly liked the one you wrote about five months ago, the one about David's donations to the preservation of tribal medicine research in the Cherokee Nation. You mentioned Dad as his longtime research partner. Dad said "it's the last compliment I'm likely to receive from Zachary while I'm still alive." He missed you, Zach, I know he did. I couldn't tell you the number of times I would see him at the desk you're at now pick up the phone and just put it down. I swear he was thinking about you. And I missed you.

ZACH

I thought I was a freelance nothing.

CAL

Hey, didn't we make up? I was talking about reading your stuff, how Dad and I liked it.

ZACH

Okay, yeah. We made up in our way.

CAL

And maybe, who knows, we could even get on better Christmas card terms. The kind where you don't just toss them away. Maybe you send me a Christmas card back.

ZACH

Perhaps. And hey, about the stuff earlier...

CAL

Don't go ruin this with real apologies. We both said...stuff. I like your articles and you don't, well, whatever you said. That stuff. You think the opposite of the negative stuff. And hey, maybe I can help you and El with this stuff.

ZACH

I'd like that. We could use the help. We can discuss our leads tomorrow.

CAL

Thanks, Z. I'm going to try to sleep. Get some sleep, too.

ZACH

Yeah. This stuff isn't going anywhere.

(CAL and ZACH exit.)

END SCENE

ACT II  
Scene 2

ZACH

Are you sure you feel up to this, Uncle David?

DAVID

Positively sure. Don't worry about me, son.

ZACH

Because if you forgot to...

DAVID

I haven't forgotten anything. I know I can be of some help. Ask me anything you like, son.

ZACH

I read about your explorations in Central America with Dad, the time a tomb collapsed. Can you tell me anything about the fallout that stemmed from that?

DAVID

Well, there was an investigation, but that was a natural byproduct of accidents on our journeys.

ZACH

Really? Who all was involved? I assume yourself, my father, but who else?

DAVID

Let's see, son...

ZACH

The university would want to understand the nature of the accident, right? And the national government?

DAVID

Yes, yes. The university. But we haven't been found responsible, and the foundation's investigation corroborated the various investigations, so I don't see what the hold up is over moving forward with the proposal from the Ugandan government, Malcolm.

ZACH

David, I'm not Malcolm.

DAVID

Look, you're still Malcolm Able, the great explorer in the last century. Your back will heal, so will your trepidation.

ZACH

David, it's me. It's Zach, remember?

DAVID

(Beat) Forgive me, Zach. I'm regrettably tired. And the stress of the past couple days...

ZACH

It's okay. Go rest. I can have one of the drivers take you into town if you still need to go.

DAVID

Of course.

(DAVID exits. ZACH is left alone on stage for several beats. Eventually ELLIE enters.)

ELLIE

I saw David heading upstairs. I expected you two to talk for longer. (Beat) Zach, are you okay?

ZACH

What?

ELLIE

You look heartbroken. What did David tell you?

ZACH

Nothing much. He can't remember anything.

ELLIE

Can't remember? I doubt that.

ZACH

He got my name wrong.

ELLIE

That happens, I'm always confusing you and Cal.

ZACH

El, he didn't even recognize me. He thought I was Dad, and before that he just called me "son". I covered for him the whole time.

ELLIE

What do you mean?

ZACH

You don't know? Of course not. That's typical of this family.

ELLIE

Zach, what are you talking about?

ZACH

David has dementia.

ELLIE

For how long?

ZACH

He was diagnosed about three years ago. Dad knew, of course. Mom knew, Alice knew.

ELLIE

How did you find out?

ZACH

I guess because I was the closest to him he felt it was important to clue me in. It's no secret that David took more interest in me than Dad. I'm sorry this was kept from you, I just didn't think it was my place.

ELLIE

You're right. I can't imagine. Cancer slowly ate at Dad, but he never forgot who I was. I love David, he's our godfather, but it must be harder for you especially.

ZACH

It hurts me more watching him. Here's a good and decent man, whose life work was expanding knowledge that is losing his memory.

ELLIE

But all the plans he made with Dad?

ZACH

I think Dad humored him. David hasn't been doing much fieldwork since his diagnosis.

ELLIE

How bad has he been?

ZACH

He just forgot his medication at home in the stress of travel and Dad's eventual passing, so this hasn't ever happened where he forgets me. But this does mean his testimony about events are compromised. I can't trust his accounts like I hoped I could. I just didn't want to give up on him, ya know?

ELLIE

Of course. So what are you going to look into now?

ZACH

Maybe make some calls to people who knew Dad and David. Wait a second. David mentioned an investigation that took place after the tomb collapsed. It's when he called me by Dad's name. He said the investigation proved they weren't at fault.

ELLIE

I'll get in touch with my secretaries at the foundation, someone can comb through our records to find of anything matches this description. Anything of note I will have scanned and emailed.

ZACH

Right. Have them comb through anything related to Central America from about 20 years ago. If any kind of report exists then it's entirely possible it has something pertinent to this investigation.

ELLIE

I'm on it. (Beat) Are you sure, given David's dementia...

ZACH

No, I'm not. He wasn't lucid but he seemed to be recalling something. It's the best lead we have. And while you do that, I'll call Dad's attorney to see if there's any additional files in Dad's private accounts about this.

ELLIE

I can't believe I haven't considered this, but I'll have the information of anyone named "Jane" or some derivative pulled from our donor list at the foundation.

ZACH

I can't believe I hadn't considered that either. Good thinking, El. I'll be here. Oh. And this might be nothing, probably is. But can you pull any files that pertain to a Nora James. Wait, no. That's her married name.

ELLIE

Who are you talking about?

ZACH

We have a visitor, someone that was a family friend, she said. Her college was paid for by the foundation. I could have made it easier by asking for her maiden name.

ELLIE

What can I do then?

ZACH

Cross-reference anyone named Samantha Nora with a mother named Vanessa. Please? Because you love me?

ELLIE

Yeah, yeah. You're lucky Dad had the files digitized when he did. My secretaries aren't paid enough for all the searching if they weren't.

END SCENE



ACT II  
Scene 3

CAL

What's the verdict of the investigation?

ZACH

Last page.

CAL

We'll keep waiting. El, how about you.

ELLIE

Aaand...done. Damn.

CAL

That last line?

ELLIE

Yeah. Everything, though. I must say that I can see why Dad and David never spoke of this. Zach, have you finished?

ZACH (Flustered)

Yeah.

CAL

You okay?

ZACH

Yeah, just...It's rough. Turns out Wayne Nesmith, he was a poor miner from West Virginia, you see? Dad and David seemed to have hired him through a mining union, with a group of others. Wayne was present when Foster set off the explosives that left the tomb so dangerous to enter. Well, when the three were killed in collapse, Jacobs and Elliot were both covered through the university as affiliates. Since Dad was privately financing almost all of the exploration, and he outsourced for Nesmith, our miner wasn't considered an affiliate of the University of Mount Appalachia. For that reason, the university was not liable, nor did it have any obligation to the family of one Wayne Nesmith.

ELLIE

Then our insurance, the foundation's, wouldn't they have been on the hook?

ZACH

I'd be willing to bet this instance was the final time Dad ever privately outsourced. In the additional investigations, no injury was nearly this horrific. Some broken bones, cuts and bruises. No one ever died. The Able Foundation's investigation said that their insurance company at the



time was not going to pay out because Dad did not use not technically file the foundation as the contractor for Wayne Nesmith. For that reason, it was left to the mining union.

CAL

Let me guess, their union was torn on his culpability, so it was left to the insurance agency, which then failed to pay out.

ZACH

Exactly. So, Wayne probably took this trip because it was a free trip out of the country, and he was poor and probably tired of the coal mines. And...well, you read it.

CAL

Anything else to read?

ZACH

Take your pick. You and Ellie both can read anything on the desk.

CAL

Is this Nora's file from the foundation?

ZACH

It is. Based on the dates, I'm almost confident that she is Wayne's daughter. Nora said she remembers her father's death, and this timeline puts her at seven years old when the tomb collapsed in Central America. She's from coal country, and Wayne is a miner. Her maiden name in her first application with the foundation is Nesmith.

ELLIE

This one isn't Dad, is it? It's typed, like a typewriter. You two remember the typewriter Mom used to write on?

CAL

Let me see. (Beat) Yeah, this look like Mom's writing. It's part of her *Blue Hills* collection it looks like. Just reading the opening. But it doesn't look familiar, and I'd know, I read all her stuff.

ELLIE

Do you think Dad meant for us to read this, or maybe it was mixed in with Mom's works?

CAL

I doubt this was ever published. One way to find out, though. Read it together?

(ZACH is handed the short story and begins reading it allowed.)

ZACH

*The Blue Hill was still that morning. A light breeze meant that rain was coming soon. Children filtered into the valley as summer approached despite their parents' wishes. June was the*

*flooding season in Blue Hill, and the cave children made a playground was the one place parents asked them to avoid until August.*

(MALCOLM and the EXPLORER 1, EXPLORER 2, and EXPLORER 3 will play the children in this scene. They are running into the valley)

MALCOLM

Last one there has to ask Mr. Ryan about his toupee!

EXPLORER 2

I know I'm not going to be last!

EXPLORER 3

Come on, guys, don't make me ask again! He said he's going to hold me back a year if I call him bald again.

EXPLORER 1

Another year to call him bald.

(MALCOLM trips.)

MALCOLM

Woah!

(Each EXPLORER make it to the bottom before MALCOLM.)

EXPLORER 1

Made it!

EXPLORER 2

Me too!

EXPLORER 3

I wasn't last! I wasn't last!

MALCOLM

I guess I'm repeating the fourth grade.

EXPLORER 3

Better you than me! Cheer up, you know you're the smartest kid in class. He can't hold you back.

(EVERYONE laughs.)

MALCOLM

Let him try. I'll glue him to the chair, put chalk in the eraser, frogs in his water. He will get the old substitute teacher gag every day.

EXPLORER 2

And he ain't even a sub!

EXPLORER 1

Let's all stay back then. Fourth grade might be easier a second time.

MALCOLM

Say, yeah! Let's! And then we can be treasure hunters another year.

EXPLORER 3

I thought we were pirates?

EXPLORER 2

Pirates, treasure hunters, all the same thing. We plunge into the sea or the caves for gold!

ALL TOGETHER

**We plunge and dig for gold  
Plunge and dig till we is old  
Our laundry we never fold  
Cause we dig and plunge for gold!**

(The boys laugh and sit cross-legged now in a circle.)

ZACH

*And so the kids convened the meeting of treasure hunters. They spoke of their expeditions to be had. Together their journeys would lead to the tombs of Egypt where pharaohs rest undisturbed beneath the sand, free of molestation by the living for centuries. Primitive tribes would share their oral history that speaks treasures unforetold into existence. A light drizzle set in that did not dampen their creativity.*

EXPLORER 3

When I grow up, I am going to sail the Nile. And find things still unfound in the Valley of the Kings. I read about them in a book at school.

EXPLORER 2

I'm going to find more cave drawings from the earliest humans. If the French haven't discovered them all first.

EXPLORER 1

In Central America, the tribes were living in mountains and in caves. We could probably find artifacts no American has seen if are nice to the locals.

MALCOLM

We can find all that here. Treasure and buried kings. They're all just inside the cave!

EXPLORER 2

Yeah, let's go! I bet Indians drew on the caves here.

EXPLORER 3

But these aren't Egyptians.

EXPLORER 1

And the rain is picking up. Shouldn't we be getting back?

MALCOLM

Only if you're chicken! You ain't a chicken now, are ya? Bawk, bawk, bawk!

EXPLORER 1

I'm not a chicken. I can go anywhere you go!

MALCOLM

Then come on!

ZACH

*As the children descended into the cave for wonders imagined, the rain only increased. Their games distracted them from the rising danger around their ankles.*

(As the boys play, MALCOLM climbs onto a rock that is well above the EXPLORERS' heads.)

MALCOLM

Behold! I am the king of the cave, the best explorer there is!

(The EXPLORERS all cheer.)

ZACH

*But their joy was short lived. Thunder cracked, reverberating off the cave walls. The flooding season had now begun to claim the cave.*

(The EXPLORERS are being washed away. MALCOLM stands petrified on the rock. EXPLORER 3, the closest to MALCOLM reaches for help.)

EXPLORER 3

HELP!

MALCOLM

I can't reach!

(EXPLORER 3 is swept away finally.)

MALCOLM

No! Please, no!

(BLACK OUT. When the lights raise, MALCOLM is left sitting alone on stage, perched on the rock, he is in an uneasy sleep. Voices from outside the cave can be heard.)

VOICE OVERS

(Shouting) Hello?

(Shouting) Shout back if you can.

MALCOLM

(Shouts back) I'm here! I can hear you.

VOICE OVERS

(Quieter) Thank God.

(Shouting) We found them! Don't move if you're hurt, kids. We are coming to get you.

MALCOLM

(Shouting) It's just—I will...

END SCENE

ACT II  
Scene 4

ALICE

The Detectives Able. How goes the research?

CAL

Ask our leader.

ELLIE

He's pouring over the same Central American investigation for the fourth time.

ALICE

Is Jane really going to be in there?

ZACH

It wasn't the first three times I read it.

ALICE

He speaks! Paul dropped this offer for you.

ZACH

Is it from Dad's vault?

ALICE

He didn't say. He said these were the only documents in Malcolm's safety deposit box.

ZACH

It's some old newspaper clippings.

ALICE

What were you hoping for?

ELLIE

He'll resurface after finishing the article. He was hoping for some kind of ledger where Dad accounted for Jane. Maybe even some kind of journal entry about a Jane.

CAL

Hey, Alice, do you know anything about this? It looks like stuff Mom used to write.

ALICE

Well, the Blue Hills were her shorts. I have a copy of her collection but I can't say I read them all. The few I did read were probably ten years ago? Why do you ask, dear?

CAL

It was in Dad's journals.

ZACH

I don't see the name Jane anywhere in these. Just some obituaries.

ALICE

Whose obituaries?

ZACH

Edward Jones, William Norman, and Harrison Evans. By the looks of it they died...died about the age of ten. Does those names mean anything to you?

ALICE

Give me that.

ZACH

Alice?

ALICE

I'm sorry, Zach. It's just been a long time since I've heard those names outside my own thoughts. Actually hearing them now...it's almost like they're from another life.

ELLIE

Who were they?

ALICE

They, uh...they were friends of mine and your father. Mostly your father. Uh, when we were kids Malcolm was inseparable from Ed, Billy, and Harry. One day they wandered off into a cave in the area—

ZACH

Bluford's Cave.

ALICE

Yes, that one. But how did you know that? I can't imagine Malcolm speaking of it.

CAL

Dad would yell at me and Zach for playing there as kids in the summer.

ALICE

That's smart. Malcolm and his friends must have played there all summer but with the flash flooding in the area that hits during that time of year, you two might not have made it out in time.

ZACH

Is that what happened to these kids in the obituaries?

ALICE

Yes. There's no mention of how they died in their obituaries. I imagine if you had the rest of the newspaper there wouldn't be another mention of them or the cave flooding. No one asked questions, they didn't need to, so Malcolm didn't offer an account of things. It was something everyone just wanted to forget.

ZACH

Even our dad?

ALICE

I imagine he did, but without success. I'd hazard a guess that David was the only true friend my brother had since he was 10.

END SCENE



ACT II  
Scene 5

CAL

That's everybody, isn't it? Three of us don't know; David doesn't remember, Alice can tell us about their childhood but nothing more; Mom and Dad certainly can't tell us anything.

ELLIE

Maybe we fly up to the foundation now the rain is letting up. If we are all three there then we can pull any file, there's no wait.

CAL

I need an excuse to go to New York.

ELLIE

Other than having business there? But I'll take that as a yes. So Cal's in, what say you, youngest brother?

ZACH

It's here.

ELLIE

Come again?

CAL

The foundation is in New York, buddy.

ZACH

No, her. Don't you see it? Either of you? It's all here. Look. It's all...here. Wayne Nesmith was the miner who died on Dad's expedition in Central America. His wife's name is Vanessa. Their daughter came to the house, Nora. She's married now but she said her maiden names was Nesmith. Nora said her mom received financial assistance from Dad. That has to be the bank account. What if that bank account that Dad set up was a settlement over Wayne's death? And, what if her middle name is Jane.

ELLIE

Yeah, but we can't examine the contents of the account, not even who has access to it.

ZACH

That's a roadblock but we have a detour. What do we know about Nora's mother?

CAL

You said Nora told you she's had hip surgery recently.

ZACH

Before that.

CAL

Her mother works in hotels.

ELLIE

No, she's retired.

ZACH

No, back on the hotels. She was the manager.

ELLIE

You're much better at conveying a point in your articles.

ZACH

It's all here.

CAL

Then tell us.

ZACH

Vanessa J. Nesmith or Vanessa Jane Nesmith would be online. Something about her as a businesswoman or on the Better Business Bureau. Give me your laptop, El. Right here, "Sterling Springs Hotel honors retiring matriarch." And see, there it is! I told you!

ELLIE

*"Sterling Springs Hotel says goodbye to their longest-tenured employee this past Friday night. Hired as the receptionist 24 years ago, Jane Nesmith enjoyed promotion after promotion until she was named manager by the hotel's late owner, Jim French, almost a decade ago."*

CAL

Jane?

ZACH

Vanessa J. Nesmith seemed to go by her middle name.

ELLIE

Even if she gets all this money and this great job, how else do we know she's connected to Dad? We can't prove she has access to the account or Dad referred her to anything.

ZACH

Vanessa's husband worked for Dad, he was killed on a job sight, Dad personally settled with her when it became evident that the insurance of the university didn't cover Wayne, nor did the mining union's. But the settlement didn't just end here. I don't need to see who has access to the bank account to know that Dad was helping this family out more than coincidental involvement. Nora said she had her med school funded through the Able Foundation. When you had her files pulled, I looked over them briefly to see who her father was. He wasn't mentioned. Just the mother. Cal, can you read this over.

CAL

Sure. What am I looking for?

ZACH

I swear I couldn't tell you the mother's information on that file from memory. I was trying to establish a timeline with Nora's age as a factor. I am willing to bet you that her mother's name is Vanessa Jane Nesmith.

CAL

"First name: Vanessa; Middle..." Oh, just the initial. "Middle initial: J."

ELLIE

Why would she include her mother's information on a medical school application? Nora would have been recognized by the foundation as an independent filer.

ZACH

She was filing as a minor at the time.

ELLIE

You said you didn't remember the information.

ZACH

Her mother's information. Not Nora's. I mean, I remember Nora. My mind holds onto odd details. The files you gave me included her undergraduate funding. If an applicant was under the age of 18 when applying for funding, the Able Foundation requires a legal guardian's signature. Jane crops up again on foundation's documentation.

ELLIE

But the college scholarships require a disclosure of the guardian's income to see if they qualify for aid. Our major funding is targeted toward low-income applicants. A hotel manager, even as a single mother, is surely over the poverty threshold we require.

CAL

She's right, Zach. Vanessa is making more than \$84,000 at this moment.

ZACH

If you look at the last page. Both of you, you'll see. Nora wasn't granted funding because she was financially desperate. Her mom had access to millions by that point, or Nora could have waited a little longer when she turned 18 and probably had access herself to the Jane account for all we know. But that isn't relevant, and do you see why?

CAL

Dad signed this grant form.

ELLIE

Nora was named to the "Founder's Finest".

CAL

What?

ELLIE

Remember in Dad's will where it declared any grandkid of his goes to college for free? "The Founder's Finest" are handpicked for funding by the President of the Able Foundation. It's really rare to have more than three people selected. Sometimes years pass between selections. I've only signed off on one in my year as president.

CAL

But why are they picked if not a need for the money?

ELLIE

It's at the president's discretion. It could be grades or a stunning resume. Anything.

ZACH

Anything, exactly. And it's rare, like you said. What are the odds then that Vanessa's middle initial is J, that a Jane is mentioned in Dad's will specifically, that a Vanessa's husband died when working for Dad, that a Vanessa J. was married to a man named Nesmith who died and their daughter showed up to pay respects to Dad, and that same daughter is given the most prestigious collegiate funding by our father when maybe forty have been selected in the entire history of the Able Foundation?

ELLIE

My God. Did you...

ZACH

I think so.

ELLIE

Zachary, just...how?

ZACH

I'm good at my job, I guess.

CAL

So wait, how does the short story tie back. Any ideas, Zach?

ZACH

Right. Yeah. It all fits now; it's survivor's guilt. Dad was ten years old when his friends drowned in front of him. It wasn't his fault he lived but that didn't stop Dad from carrying that baggage, probably until the day he died. There's nothing a poor ten year old can do to make amends for that, but Dad wasn't poor the rest of his.

ELLIE

(It dawns on her.)

The foundation. The college funds.

ZACH

You have a mind for investigation.

CAL

I don't get it.

ELLIE

Dad helped thousands of kids go to college, a lot of time for free. He couldn't make it up to the families of Eddie, Billy, and Harrison, at least not directly. So he made it up to the community, right, Zach? Yeah, so a lot of the money from explorations was poured back in our hometown as Dad's way of honoring his childhood friends.

CAL

Do you think that's why Dad sold everything? I know he went to the places from Mom's short stories, the places the boys dreamed of going. He needed to raise the money for the foundation. And he also didn't want to glorify himself. In Central America, in that journal, he alludes to raising people up like kings and forgetting those who serve the king. That...

ZACH

Yeah?

CAL

That's why he never opened a museum?

ZACH

And it's why he never wrote an autobiography. He felt guilty enough for being alive still. And when the tomb collapsed that killed three more people, Dad made sure everyone was taken care of. Even if that came out of his own pocket. But the difference between the childhood and adult traumas is Dad spoke through Mom and her short stories; this tomb collapse is something he couldn't talk about.

ELLIE

No, because he expected you to talk for him.

CAL

Wow. So that's it. When do you start writing about it?

ZACH

I'll start tomorrow, I think. Do I credit you two as my research team? How do you want to split that up?

ELLIE

We were just along for the ride. Honest, I'm just looking forward to reading it all lined up.

CAL

The way I see it, Dad gave me millions in stocks. Ellie has a better job than either of us. Not to mention the power of life and death over hopeful college students. Nah, this one was meant to be all yours, bro. You included us as some bonding effort? I don't know, but it was fun seeing you work. And swing by my office if you want to start up that blog. You know, after you make your millions off the book deal.

ZACH

Book deal? You really think?

ELLIE

Oh, I do. The board would gladly find a partner to publish such a work. I'm talking a hefty advance, and upon publication we would love to buy Dad's personal memoirs. Assuming the university doesn't outbid us.

ZACH

Would they even try?

CAL

Yes, and you'll let them, Z. I'll even represent you since this is a business move. And we can update your business model for the news outlet you dreamed of. Trust me, you're going to make a pretty penny on Dad's story, but you will also get a lot of other rich people interested as your stock will be skyrocketing. You'll want to strike early.

ZACH

Wow, I haven't even contacted Mrs. Nesmith yet. I want to see if she will consent to an interview.

CAL

Told you, his stock is going to be rising.

ZACH

I just...sorry, I'm the speechless one for a moment. A lot. All at once. Damn. Cuban cigar anyone? I own everything in this office, so these should count.

ELLIE

Sure, how many times do you get to celebrate these things? Hey, is that the card you tucked away from Dad?

ZACH

Yeah, I guess so. It said "for after". I guess I took that as after I read his memoir it was attached to but I never thought of it until now.

CAL

Go on, what's it say?

ZACH

*By now I expect there are no secret between you and I. I love you, Dad.*

END OF PLAY

## CHAPTER 3

### DELETED SCENES AND BONUS FEATURES

This thesis afforded me the chance to explain aspects about the script's conceptualization that do not make their way into the finished manuscript. Someone directing or acting in it might not know what motivated me to even write it, and while that is not essential to producing a play, it is something crucial to a thesis. Furthermore, this is a rare chance as a playwright to include a scene removed from in the various drafts that were poignant (at least to myself).

The scene attached was the second I wrote when I started *Jane* as a play in the summer of 2016. Originally drafted as the second scene of Act II, Zach is visited by a form of a deceased Malcolm. By form, I mean Malcolm coming to Zach as a ghost, in a dream, or as kind of hallucination. I never distinguished what Malcolm's form was, feeling it was necessary to allow readers and potential directors make their own decision. In the following scene, Zach and Cal originally give indication that Cal overhears Zach's discussion with their late father's form. Cal confirms a phrase said by Malcolm later in life, a phrase said weeks before his death when Malcolm and Zach were still not speaking, thus lending credence to the idea that Malcolm could have been there in the form of a ghost. In fact, in the first draft when Candice was still alive, she is visited by the same form of Malcolm in her grief. One reader said she saw this as a manifestation of grief by both Zach and Candice rather than a true ghost. My committee's objection to the scene was that it did not thematically fit the rest of the script since no other supernatural elements were involved.

Aside from the intrigue that surrounds this scene, it was just fun to write. It also feels like a common intrigue, to commune with deceased relative to gain closure. I was fortunate enough to meet Dr. Art Bochner and Dr. Carolyn Ellis when they were guest lecturers from the



University of South Florida. Both described their auto-ethnographic work on loss. Dr. Bochner's article "Bird on the Wire" (2012) was discussed at length. In it, he details a fictional conversation he shares with his deceased father that served as a chance for Dr. Bochner to bridge the division with his father, even if it was only for his own closure. Theatrically speaking, this scene was meant to be Zach's closure with his father, and I expressed this to Dr. Bochner in the talkback head in October 2017.

In addition to the omitted scene, I have included my original outline for the first draft. When I reflect on the outline, I take away how much editing impacts a script. Herb said several times that a play is truly written in the revisions and editing. *Janey* consisted of sixteen scenes, but *Jane* has ten scenes. The most apparent change was removing Candice from the present day, relegating her to two flashbacks. Another omission that is apparent when comparing the most recent draft to the outline is the removal of the news outlets covering Malcolm's death and the events that follow. This device was meant to show the vast wealth Malcolm possessed and the massive influence he commanded. The media hounding the Able family also served as a commentary on the intrusive nature of American media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, furthering the isolated nature of Malcolm and those who survived him in death.

### *Ready in Stages*

I prepared a reading of my third draft on March 15, 2018 in the black box studio. My three committee members were in attendance. My cast consisted of Ryan Leonard, Evin McQuistion, Caroline Denning, Levi Bradford, Vianna Isbister, Nolyn Taylor, Kristen Lantz, Francisco Rodriguez, Sylvann Fox, and Hunter Thomas. Several doubled up on parts, and I gave a little background on each character. Aside from that, I just listened to their reading. Some moments came out of their mouths as I heard them in my head. Ryan's reading of Zach was spot

on with what I had imagined for the character. This encouraged me as a playwright because an age-appropriate actor could do my lead actor justice in his first reading. Additionally, many of the dramatic and comedic moments were evident to my readers. An audible sign of discomfort occurred when Zach used Cal's divorce as a punchline, and again whenever Zach told Malcolm to remove him from the will. My comedic moments are few and come from my own dry humor. Hearing them land with an audience, even if they were the readers, justified their inclusion. I readily admit that several moments did not work for me, namely the interpretation of lines. I do not hold this entirely against the readers; each had a day with the script and had not read it aloud prior to our reading. Several scenes are long and can be wordy at times. This has been part of my style. The best way for me to develop the script will be to have additional readings.

A missed opportunity with the reading was the lack of a talkback with my readers and a potential audience. The reading was hampered by a snow day forcing us to reschedule, availability, someone showing up late, finishing near 10:00 PM, and trepidation by some actors about having an audience without at least one read-through. In the future I will better prepare for a talkback. I got to briefly discuss the script after the reading. Each reader was positive about the experience. One actress expressed how clear each character's objectives were. Conversely, one reader said the journal entries read as too much exposition at times but qualified this as an observation of my writing style rather than a criticism. Even as a criticism, I find it to be fair because another person said that the dig scenes were described so elaborately that seeing them staged would have been beneficial. Additionally, the mystery was either too obvious with Nora's scene or was revealed too suddenly in the final scene.

Another major benefit to a reading accounting for the runtime (Act I: fifty-seven minutes; Act II: fifty minutes). Bobby suggested trimming enough to make the acts closer to fifty and

forty-five minutes, respectively. A conservative estimate would be an additional ten minutes per act when fully staged in a production. Gauging my own writing style, I would guess it is closer to fifteen additional minutes per act. That puts the play anywhere from two hours and fifteen minutes to two hours and thirty minutes. The more I can trim, the more attention I can hold, but two and a half hours is still a reasonable runtime for modern audiences. I am confident that a market still exists for a two-and-a-half-hour play. Should *Jane* be produced one day, I think a good director would find this an interesting, but manageable challenge.

*Omitted Scene*

Act II – Scene 2: Malcolm's office

(ZACH is asleep, his face in a journal.  
When he awakes he sees MALCOLM  
sitting in a chair.)

ZACH

(rubbing his eyes) D-Dad...? Ahh!

MALCOLM

Hello, Zachary. Didn't mean to frighten you, I apologize.

ZACH

But aren't you dead?

MALCOLM

Oh, yes. I'm dead, you're right, son.

ZACH

Then wha-what are you doing here?

MALCOLM

Sitting in my office; what are you doing?

ZACH

Reading through the journals you left me. You know, making use of my inheritance.

MALCOLM

You seem disappointed in what I left you. Would you have preferred money?

ZACH

I'd have preferred my fair share.

MALCOLM

Oh, I didn't realize I worked for decades just to give you whatever you wanted when I finally kicked the bucket. You make it sound like it was my money to give away.

ZACH

Cal and Ellie got generous checks, but not me?

MALCOLM

Cal and Ellie also didn't tell me to, what was it again, shove my will up my ass? You're lucky to have inherited anything at all with your remarks.

ZACH

You gave me books, it is the same as inheriting nothing.

MALCOLM

Nonsense. Have you any idea how often I was asked to publish my journals? Can you even estimate the number of publishers that pounded at my door? You want cash, sell my journals to the highest bidder.

ZACH

No, I couldn't do that.

MALCOLM

Oh? Why not?

ZACH

They're not my words to sell, that would be wrong.

MALCOLM

Sounding like the journalist you always aspired to be.

ZACH

Is that why you're here, to remind me I never finished college? (Stands to leave) Why don't I just give you the room to contemplate your disappointment in me?

MALCOLM

I'm a ghost, son. Do you really believe I couldn't just follow you about the house?

ZACH

Then I will walk the grounds.

MALCOLM

Feel free to. I warn you that my name is still on the deed to this property, meaning I can ghost about the place as I wish.

ZACH

Then I can just leave your house for good, that's what you always wanted, wasn't it?

MALCOLM

You honestly think I wanted you to walk out that door, hating me as you did? Four years, Zachary. I did not have a proper conversation with my youngest child for four years.

ZACH

Maybe you should have considered that when you refused me the money I asked for.

MALCOLM

Perhaps. Or maybe you could have finished college as we agreed before getting anything.

ZACH

I just don't get you! Cal and Ellie asked for money plenty of times. Ellie was shacking up with some boyfriend in an apartment you paid for, but that was fine?

MALCOLM

Then let's address what you don't understand. First, neither asked for as much money as you did.

ZACH

That's a lie! You invested how many millions into Cal's business?

MALCOLM

After he finished college, which we agreed upon. When he learned how sick he offered to pay for my treatment. I laughed; I had more money than could be spent in a dozen lifetimes. It wasn't that Cal's gesture didn't touch me, but it wasn't what I needed. I needed my children near me.

ZACH

You didn't reach out to me, okay? You can't put all the blame on me.

MALCOLM

I'm not, Zachary.

ZACH

Then why are you haunting me? Why can't you just leave me alone to read these damn books.

MALCOLM

Trust me, son, I would were I able. But I'm only here because of your guilt.

ZACH

I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry for being selfish. I'm sorry I never lived up to your standard for myself.

MALCOLM

Don't give me that song and dance, you know that isn't why you're tormented. I wasn't perfect either, I admit that. I felt I made more mistakes with you than your brother or sister. Until you have children you can't begin to understand the disappointment on your child's face. I had to live with that. But we aren't having this discussion because you feel I was too hard on you. Why am I here? What are you living with, son?

ZACH

I missed your funeral. I never got a chance to say goodbye. Or that I was sorry. I sat in my hotel for hours, just staring at the clock. I couldn't make myself get up because I was too stubborn. And I also...I was too scared to face everyone. What would they think of me showing up now that you were dead when I knew you had cancer for two full years? And whether you're really

here as some ghost or I'm just guilt ridden you didn't know I wasn't there. But I know, Dad. I know I wasn't there and I have to live with that.

MALCOLM

Just between us, son, I never wanted much of a funeral. It was more for you kids and your mother. I even had scripture read for their sake (they laugh at this). (Beat) The way people I knew that died, so suddenly, it's just...well, public mourning was just something I never wanted for myself. Just say goodbye in your own way, son.

ZACH

Was this your way of saying it to me then?

MALCOLM

Honestly, I don't know, Zachary. I just wish, in whatever form I take now, that I didn't have to die for us to finally talk again.

End Scene.

*Original Outline*

**Janey Outline**

**ACT I**

- David is called by Candice while watching the news
- The major players converge on the Able House (notably the living room) after Malcolm's funeral
- Zach finally arrives in time for the reading of Malcolm's last will and testimony
  - Introduction of "Janey," an absent person entitled to a large sum of money.
  - Zach and Cal have a physical altercation
- Zach reads Malcolm's expedition logs
  - Flashbacks of Malcolm's early expeditions
- Candice and Alice discuss Candice's options
- Zach recounts to Aunt Alice moments about his nuclear family
  - Calvin receives a business loan
  - Ellie is caught shacking up with a boyfriend
- Zach reads Malcolm's expedition logs
  - Flashback of Malcolm's expedition where men die.

**ACT II**

- Zach recounts the last conversation he had with Malcolm
  - Zach is refused any funds and tells Malcolm to shove the will up his ass
- Zach is revisited by Malcolm's ghost
- Zach and Cal make amends
- Candice and Alice discuss Candice's options
- Zach discusses the expeditions with David
- Candice, Ellie, and Alice scene (potentially)
- Zach reads over his father's personal memoirs
  - Malcolm recounts the time his childhood friends drowned
- Zach confirms his suspicions about the widows being "Janey" with Candice
- The show ends with another news cast



## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

*“And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make.” – The Beatles (Lennon and McCartney, 1969.)*

Writing this script was an endeavor that was put off for years for fear that I was not ready to write it. I was afraid I was not ready as a person or storyteller to fully articulate what my imagination had wrestled with for so long. While I am pleased with the finished product for the purposes of this thesis, I still want to perfect this script going forward, which requires rewrites from workshops and listening to what directors have to say that attempt producing it on some level. Ultimately, I want to see *Jane* ready for publication one day. The mindset suggested by Herb for the duration of this thesis was to think of myself as a playwright, and it is this mindset I cannot divorce from this project. I cannot speak for future projects, but now that I think of *Jane* through the mindset of “Gleason Holt, playwright,” I will continue to approach the manuscript with the same level of dedication after graduation.

#### *Future Projects*

A primary concern is that I need to conduct more research in several areas addressed in *Jane*. Two major fields of study that need to be researched further are anthropology and archeology. These each what encompass most of Malcolm and David’s field of study. This will give me insight into techniques used on digs that can be transferred to the sensitive nature of Malcolm and David’s digs. Exploring caves is essential to the plot, with spelunking mentioned. Rather than only saying Central America, I could research abandoned civilizations in that part of the world and make a fictionalized tribal government. Lastly, Zach is meant to be a successful

journalist, so understanding investigative journalism, namely for freelance journalists, would be a great addition to future revisions.

Writing creates the necessity for reading and eventual productions. My hope is to workshop this script any chance I get. The more I hear these words, the better I can serve the story through fine-tuning. With my work in the past, my best edits have come from listening to actors say the words and telling me what works and what does not. I have been resistant at times to what my committee has suggested (to their credit, each have said it is my script to write so any changes are ultimately my call) but I remind myself that two of them are both a director and playwright, the other is an expert in dramatic literature. Their advice comes from a place of experience and great consideration for me as an aspiring playwright. Herb insists that I find more moments to show the love this family has for one another. He advises against writing new scenes to do it, but instead rely on the existing script.

I have been in talks with a number of potential directors who might workshop *Jane (or, Dug In)* for me. I would like to have a more directed reading for an audience with the final draft as it pertains to my thesis. I have spoken with members of the ETSU Patchwork Players about workshopping the script once I have graduated. A friend of mine is a theatre teacher at the high school level, and I would be willing to give her class a chance to read it aloud for me, or even perform it to whatever extent she is comfortable. The sophistication of these workshops is secondary to observing a director handle my material. I envision less involvement so I can gain a sense of how my work is handled by another director. Should I be asked why a school or community theatre should workshop my play, I have two reasons: first, as the writer I can make any reasonable changes (such as profanity for schools) to suit their needs; second, it would not cost them a royalty fee as I am still working toward publication. An immediate plan is to submit

the script to as many different new play competitions as I possibly can. The feedback I receive from those who have never met me and/or read my previous work would be an invaluable experience for future revisions of *Jane (or, Dug In)*. Publication is ultimately the conclusion to writing *Jane*. Publication is many steps removed from my current work on the manuscript, but until I have been paid for the initial publication, I am technically still in the writing process.

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